

# **Collected Sermons and Writings**

**On Subjects Useful for Bible Studies  
and Practical Godly Living**

**VOLUME 1**

by  
**Michael Rudolph**

**Published by Tikkun America, Inc.**

# **Collected Sermons and Writings**

## **On Subjects Useful for Bible Studies and Practical Godly Living**

### **VOLUME 1**

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## Dedication

First and foremost, I want to declare my love for my excellent wife and partner in life Marie, a true *Proverbs 31* woman, without whose unfailing love and support during these forty-six years of our marriage, I would not have had the peace of mind, energy, and freedom to produce the sermons and writings that comprise this book. If this book is in any way useful to others, Marie is as much responsible for it as I.

I also want to recognize the contributions to my life and ministry of my fellow elders Ralph E. Finley and Marcellus Powell of *Ahavat Yeshua*, and Scott Moore, Bruce Bakaysa, Anshel S., and Aaron Allsbrook of *Ohev Yisrael Messianic Jewish Congregation*, the pulpit from which most of the sermons contained within this book were delivered.

And of course, I thank the Lord, for allowing this work to be written by one such as I who knows better than anyone how unworthy and blessed I am to attach my name to it.



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## Foreword

### Rabbi David Rudolph, Ph.D.

*Director of Messianic Jewish Studies • The King's University*

**Y**oled *chacham v'yismach-bo* (“He who has a wise son delights in him”) declares Proverbs 23:24 but the reverse is also true, “He who has a *wise father* delights in him.” In the spirit of honoring one’s father and *kvelling* about him, I would like to share a son’s perspective on the *mensch* who has written these volumes. My father, Michael Rudolph, is now eighty years old, and for fifty years I have witnessed the *chochma* (wisdom) that God has lavished on him.

In the Messianic Jewish community, at least in our little corner of it, my father has a reputation for being a wise and hospitable rabbi. I don’t know how many times I have heard someone say to me, “Are you Rabbi Michael’s son? I love your father. Many years ago, he took me to a Chinese restaurant, and we talked about. . . . His advice changed my life.” My father is not only a rabbi with decades of pastoral care experience; he is also a Renaissance man with knowledge that spans across numerous fields of study, including mathematics, science, medicine, law, theology, counseling, and psychology. His many credentials and accomplishments include:

- B.S. (Bachelor of Science: Applied Mathematics, minors in Chemistry and Physics), Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, 1961.
- Graduate Studies (Medicine and Bio-science), New York University, 1961-1964.
- Police Officer, Landover Hills, Maryland, Police Department, 1965.
- Patent Searcher, Pennie, Edmonds, Morton, Taylor and Adams, Washington, D.C., 1966-1967.
- J.D. (Juris Doctor), George Washington University Law Center, 1968.
- Attorney and Counselor at Law, General Practice, Virginia and The District of Columbia, 1968-2007.
- Graduate Studies (Educational Psychology), Catholic University of America, 1972-1974.
- Neuropsychology Practicum (Neuropsychology), George Washington University Hospital, Washington, D.C., 1973.
- Member of the Bar, Supreme Court of The United States of America, 1974 to present.
- The first certified Messianic Jewish covenant surgeon (*mohel*), Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, 1981.
- Th.M. (Master of Theology), Messiah Biblical Institute and Graduate School of Theology, 1989.
- Founder and First President, Knight Protective Service, Inc., Gaithersburg, Maryland, 1991-1994.
- Licensed Private Investigator, State of Maryland, 1991-2000; Virginia, 1991-1994; Washington, D.C., 1992.
- Principal, Ets Chaiyim Tree of Life School (Elementary through High School), Gaithersburg, Maryland, 1995-1996.
- Judicial Elder, Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, 1997-present.
- Arbitrator, Superior Court of The District of Columbia, 1997-2000.
- Founder, Executive Director and Counselor (Certified), Biblical Counseling Institute, Washington, D.C., 1999 to present.
- Certificate Studies (Astronomical Photometry), Dyer Observatory of Vanderbilt University / IAPPP, Nashville, Tennessee, 2001.
- Certification Training (Critical Incident Stress Management: Individual Crisis Intervention and Peer Support), University of Maryland (UMBC), Baltimore, Maryland, 2010.

- Certification Training (Pastoral Crisis Intervention), University of Maryland (UMBC), Baltimore, Maryland, 2010.
- Military Chaplain Ecclesiastic Endorsement, Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, April 6, 2018 to present.
- Chaplain, United States Coast Guard Auxiliary Clergy Support, April 10, 2018 to present.

This is just a sampling of his many endeavors. The full list is eleven pages long! All of these fields of knowledge have informed the breadth and depth of my father's wisdom, and in turn the toolbox from which he has been able to assist others, *b'ezrat Hashem* (with the help of God).

In addition to being a wise and hospitable rabbi, I can attest that Michael Rudolph is a loving father and my best friend. Once I made a list of reasons why I love my father. They include: (1) I can talk with him about anything, even my most difficult struggles; (2) he prays for me; (3) he is full of wisdom and good advice; (4) he helps me to succeed in everything the Lord has called me to do in life; (5) he loves the people I love; (6) he is very generous to me; (7) he sacrifices for me; and (8) he taught me about the Lord and continues to teach me.

With respect to this last area—*avi mori* (my father, my teacher)—it is worth mentioning the diverse ways that my father has taught me and spiritually blessed me over the years. To begin with, *Erev Shabbat* (Friday night) dinners at our home were times to talk about the Lord, the Torah, Jewish prayer, and Messianic Jewish identity. My father always came to the table with spiritual questions he was pondering. He shared his thoughts with all of us and invited us to think together with him about these questions. In this way, he included family and guests in his thought process, and together we arrived at a deeper understanding of the spiritual matter he was mulling over.

On Sunday mornings, my father and I regularly had breakfast at the local bagel shop. Then we went to Abe's Jewish Book and Gift Store which had a neon sign in the front window that said, "If it's Jewish we have it!" I loved going to this Jewish bookstore because my father would buy me any book I wanted. He also regularly brought me to Olive Branch Christian Bookstore where, again, I could purchase all the books I wanted. Looking back, this was the beginning of my library of theology and devotional books that pointed me in the direction of *derech Adonai* (the way of the Lord). Some of these books the Lord used to capture my heart as a young person.

I also took classes that my father taught at Messiah Yeshiva. In particular, I remember his Biblical Counseling courses and the many discussions we had over the material. When I wrote research and reflection papers, my father wanted to read them and share his thoughts. He also asked me to read *his* papers and give *him* comments! Countless times when I was a teenager, my father said to me, "David, what do you think about this?" It was clear to me that he saw the potential within me to have an insight that he didn't have, and he sought to draw it out of me by asking me questions.

My father regularly prays for me. During my early high school years, when I was not walking with the Lord, he interceded for me in prayer. Later, he told me that he viewed it as priming the pump in the hopes that one day I would be filled with God's Spirit, something that eventually happened and transformed my life. Without those prayers, I might not be walking with the Lord today.

My father gently corrected me, and still corrects me at times, but it is easy to hear his correction because he is transparent about his shortcomings and sins. He does not put on a pretense before me. He also has a great sense of humor, something that makes him all the more approachable. Just the other day, I pointed out that there was a spelling mistake in this manuscript. In the Table of Contents, he spelled “Foreword” as “Forward.” My father emailed back, “I am contacting Merriam-Webster and telling them that they have spelled ‘Foreward’ incorrectly and will have to change the spelling. 😊” Despite all his wisdom and knowledge, he doesn’t take himself too seriously.

On many occasions, my father placed his hands on my head and blessed me. He did this weekly at Shabbat dinners, when I had my *bar mitvah*, when I went to Japan for college, when I married Harumi (he officiated at our wedding), and when I was ordained as a rabbi.

When I was in my early twenties, my father and I worked together on planting a Messianic synagogue in Annapolis, Maryland. Over a six-year period, we often discussed issues related to pastoral care, theology and Messianic Jewish identity. It was a formal mentorship and I had the opportunity to closely watch my father serve in various rabbinical roles and then do what he did. He modeled it and I imitated him, from leading the service to counseling, to making hospital visits, to training leaders, to overseeing *chavurah* (friendship) groups, etc. More than anything, I saw how my father loved and empathized with people, young and old, and drew them closer to the Lord.

My father has always been available to me twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, whenever I am in need of wisdom or encouragement. If I call him at 3AM, he is there for me. Moreover, he is always glad and eager to help. I never get the impression that I am a burden to him. In all of this, he has taught me how to be a loving father.

I could go on and on about my father, but I think I’ve made my point that he is the real deal. He has blessed me with a heritage from the Lord that I have passed on to my children and that they will pass on to theirs in keeping with the value that our people place on *l’dor vador* (from generation to generation). What the reader is getting in these volumes is essentially a portion of that heritage. Each chapter is a compendium of my father’s thoughts on spiritual issues that he has processed over the course of forty years. It is a treasure trove of wisdom. For this reason, I encourage the reader to take to heart the words of Proverbs 22:17: *Hat ozn’cha ushma divrei chachamim* (“Pay attention and listen to the words of the wise...”). That is what I have sought to do with my father’s insights, and it has made all the difference.

**What the reader is getting in these volumes is essentially a portion of that [l’dor vador / generation to generation] heritage...**

## Preface

I recently looked back at the sermons and writings I produced over the years and realized that the subjects I chose, and the knowledge and wisdom I needed in order to convey the material to others, was not my own. It was, without a doubt, imparted to me by God, and the product collectively forms a suitable curriculum for Bible studies, teachings on Messianic Judaism, and discipleship. Assembling them was just a matter of editing and organization—hence this two-volume book that I pray will bless those who consult it.

I came to my belief in God and my faith in Messiah Yeshua as the result of two supernatural visitations of the Holy Spirit that occurred weeks apart in 1976. But first, some history leading up to it.

I was raised by secular Jewish parents in an Orthodox Jewish environment that was nurtured by both sets of grandparents. I received *Bar Mitzvah* in an Orthodox synagogue in Queens, New York and, although I believed in God, I looked at the event as my graduation from ever having to enter a synagogue again. I attended a public Junior High School, a specialized science High School and an engineering college, and through the influence of the latter two schools I was intellectualized out of any belief in God that I still may have held.

After college, I attended medical school, switched to law school, and graduated with a J.D. law degree in 1968. I passed the Virginia State Bar exam, established a small law firm, and began the practice of law in Virginia and the District of Columbia, all the while considering myself an

“atheist,” or at times an “agnostic” because I could not disprove the existence of God either. I considered myself a Jew but had no reason for it other than that I had been born into a Jewish family.

**I looked at my Bar**

**Mitzvah as my**

**graduation from**

**ever having to**

**enter a synagogue**

**again...**

”

In 1976 I was healthy, happily married, paying my bills and not looking for God, and it was in that environment that God came looking for me! One afternoon, I came home and found my house broken into with the young culprit still inside. I knew him from the neighborhood, and he knew me, because it was not the first time that he had done this same thing in order to steal to support his drug habit. On the previous occasions, I tried to reason with him to get help and not repeat, and I did not report him to the police. This time, my patience being at an end, I told him I was calling the police and that he should go downstairs to the basement and wait for them. He was high on drugs and did what I suppose seemed logical to him—he went downstairs to wait for the police.

A police officer soon arrived, and I began to tell him why I had called. But, as I spoke, I noticed that the officer

seemed distracted and uncomfortable—acting very un-police-like. I asked him: *“Is something wrong?”* He said: *“Well, yes and no.”* He said: *“I don’t want to have to tell you this because I can be fired for it, but still I have to.”* He said, *“On my way to your house God spoke to me and told me that when I came here, I had to tell you about Jesus. What makes it worse, I know that you are a Jew.”* How he knew I was a Jew I never asked him, but he proceeded to tell me about how his personal life both at home and on the police force had been troubled, and that when he turned his life over to “Jesus” everything turned around for the better. He was sure I was going to go straight to the phone and call his supervisor to complain, but I had no such intention. What I was thinking was that this poor man was so weak and stupid that he had to believe such things, and I being strong and smart, was not going to pull the rug out from under him; I would just let him talk. I was not much impressed with the logic of his story but, while he was talking, an almost tactile “force” fell upon me, and a small voice inside me was saying: *“Listen to him because he is telling you the truth.”*

Well, needless to say, I stopped listening to what the officer was saying (he was unaware of what was happening) and I began to concentrate on what was happening to me. Things like this just didn’t happen to me. I was the epitome of sobriety—I wasn’t a drinker, never tried drugs, and never had a hallucination in my life, so this was very unusual and very real. Also, without being told, I knew that the voice inside me was God, and that God was real. Wow! A minute ago, I was an atheist and now, suddenly, I knew that God was real.

At some point, the officer finished saying what he was told by God to say, and he got up and left the house. Just like that! He didn’t finish taking my report of the break-in, and he left the young man who broke into my house still downstairs. I met the officer sometime later, and he told me how frightened he had been to speak to me the way he did. Every day for a week, he expected to be called into his supervisor’s office and fired.

When the officer left, I went into my bedroom, knelt beside my bed (a very un-Jewish way to pray), and began talking to God as though he were a person. Never before had I done such a thing for, as a child, I had only been taught to pray from a *siddur*—a Jewish prayer book. While on my knees I remember telling God how humiliated I felt, that for so many years I had denied his existence and had even ridiculed others for believing in him. I told God that I wanted to turn my life around and, from then on, to serve him.

I spoke to God for some time, and just before I was finished, I asked him: *“God, how come you sent me this police officer that spoke to me about Jesus? Why didn’t you send a Jew? I know that a Jew would not have spoken about Jesus. Is Jesus really who the Christians say he is?”* I did not fully know who the Christians said Jesus was, but I had heard “Son of God;” that was just about all that I knew. When I finished speaking to God and stood up. I still did not know who Jesus was, but I had a sense that I would know soon. And the young man in my basement? He had meanwhile sobered up and let himself out of the house.

When my wife Marie came home from work, I didn’t tell her what had happened, and did not tell her for several days because I was sure she would say that I had imagined it. When I finally did tell her, days later, she just listened and showed little reaction. I learned later that even before I told her, she began to see some small changes in me that she couldn’t explain but that she liked—changes

such as my showing care for her that was unusual, and a softening in my overall demeanor. When I went to bed the first night, the tactile “force field” of God’s presence went to bed with me. It was still there the next morning, and it stayed with me every day for the next several weeks. I had a strong desire to know who Jesus was (I now call him by his Hebrew name “Yeshua”).

A while back, I had thrust upon me on a college campus, a small “Gideon” New Testament that I took home with me and put in a dresser drawer never intending to look at it again. But I remembered that it was there, and I now saw a use for it, to help me know who Jesus was. So, I retrieved it and began to read it from the beginning. I was able to spend the time because I was self-employed in my law practice and my time was flexible. I spent an hour or so reading, the first morning, and the next, and then the next, for about a week and a half. I was seriously trying to figure out who Jesus was, but the way I was going about it was how I had been taught in my law training—to weigh evidences. So, as I read, I noted those things I believed, and those that I did not. In that way, I began compiling what I thought were evidences for and against Jesus being the Messiah. Day after day, the piles of evidence pro and con got higher and higher, but the pros were not outweighing the cons (and vice versa), and I was essentially getting nowhere. I was, however, becoming educated in what was in the Bible.

Meanwhile, I remembered that my neighbor was a Christian because a year earlier he had introduced himself to me and asked me if I would like to accompany him to church. Of course, I said no at the time, but now I wanted his help, so I knocked on his door and told him what had happened to me. He became all excited and said that he had to take me to meet his pastor. He did, and what happened then had to be a pastor’s fondest dream—a Jew walking into his office and asking him to explain about Jesus. We agreed to meet for lunch at Katz’s Kosher Café, with me paying the bill and he, teaching me about Jesus—a fair arrangement on both our parts. We did that twice in the next week.

About a week-and-a-half to two weeks after my initial encounter with God, (more accurately his encounter with me) I was sitting in my home reading the New Testament as I had done daily, when I was “zapped” for a second time, and suddenly I believed who Jesus was—that he was exactly who the Bible I was reading said he was—the Messiah, the son of God, the fulness of the deity in bodily form. My sudden knowledge and absolute certainty of it had nothing to do with the evidences I was compiling. I had no logical reason to believe—I just believed it as certainly as I believed my own name. Had anyone asked me to prove that I was Michael Rudolph, other than showing him my birth certificate I could not do it, and it was the same with my sudden and newly acquired belief in Yeshua; I just knew who he was.

Well, that is how my conscious walk with God began. I say “conscious walk” because it is now evident to me that God had been walking alongside me all along. Marie and I began attending Sunday services at the pastor’s church, and I was happy in it, supposing that I was no longer a Jew and had become a Christian. That tactile “force field” that embraced me each morning (I now know it was the Holy Spirit) began to subside, and each day I felt it less and less. I suspected that I would eventually not be able to feel it at all, and I feared that one day when I could no longer feel it, I could deny that what happened ever happened. So, I resolved, then and there, to mentally what I was experiencing so that years later I would be able to rely on my memory of having meticulously studied it and assuring myself that it was real.

Now, how did I get from being a “Christian” to be a “Messianic Jew?” Here is how it happened. One day, my pastor told me that there was a congregation called “Beth Messiah,” located not far from the church, that was populated by Jewish people who believed in Yeshua the same as I. He said that since I was a Jew, I should visit there and check it out. “I’m still a Jew,” I asked him? “I thought that I had become a Christian!” I didn’t know that there was another Jew in the world that believed in Jesus because I was taught from childhood that a Jew could not. Upon his urging, I agreed to visit, although it was somewhat under protest because I was perfectly happy with the church and with being a Christian and did not have fond memories of the Judaism of my youth. Nevertheless, I visited Beth Messiah’s Friday night service and, predictably, did not like the Jewishness of it. However, something (I now know it was the Holy Spirit) drew me to visit a second time and then a third, and I was soon doing double duty—attending Beth Messiah on Friday nights and the Church on Sundays.

Over time, I put the pieces together of how I could believe in Yeshua and still be a Jew; after all, Yeshua was a Jew as were all his disciples. I eventually began to sense that it would be better for my family to be in one place of worship and to nurture one identity, either Christian or Jewish. Marie and I talked it over, and we decided to make Beth Messiah our spiritual home.

So, that is how it happened. I became discipled over time, earned graduate degrees in ministry, founded “Shalom Biblical Counseling Center,” was ordained an elder of “Beth Messiah,” founded “Ahavat Yeshua,” a sister congregation in Washington, D.C., served as Ahavat Yeshua’s congregational leader for twenty-one years, taught at “Messiah Biblical Institute,” founded “Biblical Counseling Institute” in the District of Columbia, and all the while practiced law to make a living. I left my law practice in 2006 to serve as the full-time congregational leader of “Ohev Yisrael Messianic Jewish Congregation” in Northern Virginia. I served as its Senior Leader for twelve years, and am now serving as its Associate Rabbi; my rabbinical ordination from Tikkun International, Inc. was in 2016.

## About the Bible Translations

In the course of editing my sermons and writings for this book, I became aware that not all the Scripture references cited were from the same Bible translation; some were from the New King James Version (NKJ) and some from the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB).” Since each seemed to serve its purpose, I allowed the variation to remain. I have, however, standardized on using Hebrew Bible chapter and verse numbers and, where English Bible versification is not the same, I placed it in in parenthesis. The reader should keep that in mind because the NKJ uses the English Bible’s order and versification, whereas the CJB is numbered and ordered according to the Hebrew tradition. Because of that, I have included two Scripture indices of the *Tanach* for the reader’s convenience.





**A. Days and Seasons**  
**Sermons • Vol 1**



## **Chanukah: A Time for Rededication**

*Delivered December 16, 2006*

The first thing we ought to learn about *Chanukah* is how to pronounce it. It is not *Hanukah*, and it is not *Chanooka*. It is *Chanukah*.

Okay! Now the next thing we have to know about *Chanukah* is the meaning of the word itself. That is actually a disputed issue. One explanation is that the word *Chanukah* is constructed in two parts—*Chanu* (*chet nun vav*) which means “they rested,” and “*kah*,” (*kaf hey*) which is the number 25. If we understand that *Chanukah* occurs in the month of *Kislev*, *Chanu* joined to *kah* would mean “they rested on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of *Kislev*. Although there are other explanations that have been suggested for the name *Chanukah*, this one is good enough for me.

So, if “they rested” on *Chanukah*, must it not be that *Chanukah* is a Sabbath that God commanded us to keep? So, who can show me where in the Bible we are commanded to keep *Chanukah*?

Oh? It is not there? Very strange. So, if the Bible does not command us to keep *Chanukah*, why have Jews the world over kept the festival of *Chanukah* since even before Yeshua? The answer is that it is in response to a certain event of history that is recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees, in historical treatises such as those written by Josephus, and in the *Talmud*. Although Scripture is our primary source of information, other historical writings are sometimes consulted as well.

In brief, here is what happened. In 334 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered Judea and introduced the Jews to Greek culture. After Alexander’s death, his central kingdom separated into an east and west component that warred against each other, and Judea was caught in the middle. King Antiochus IV ruled the eastern component that included Jerusalem. He mistakenly believed that the Jews were fomenting a rebellion, so he retaliated by slaughtering many Jews and prohibiting many Jewish practices upon pain of death. For example, he prohibited the keeping of Shabbat and the practice of circumcision, and he profaned the Jerusalem Temple by using it for heathen worship. In fairness, I must tell you (and I regret doing so), that some Jews had become Hellenized and supported King Antiochus against their own people.

However, there were a group of Jews in those days called *Chasidim* (no relation to the later *Chassidim* of Eastern Europe). They were led in opposing Antiochus’ oppressive measures by a family of priests called the Hasmoneans. Mattathias the priest was head of the Hasmoneans, and when an agent of King Antiochus commanded Mattathias and others to worship a foreign god, Mattathias refused. When a fellow Jew stepped forward to obey Antiochus’ command, Mattathias killed him along with a Greek official. Antiochus took a dim view of this and, as a result, Mattathias and the other Hasmoneans had to flee to the mountains to escape being killed themselves. They soon regrouped, mustered an army under Mattathias’ leadership, and began a revolt against Antiochus.

Mattathias appointed his son Judah, nicknamed “Maccabee” to lead his small Jewish army. Judah the Maccabee used guerrilla tactics to overcome a first attack launched by King Antiochus, and when Antiochus sent a larger more powerful army, it too was defeated by Judah’s much smaller

band of men. Judah's victory was unquestionably due to God's divine intervention, and so one of the themes of *Chanukah* that is relevant today, is God's protection and miraculous preservation of his people Israel.

When Judah entered Jerusalem, he found God's Temple desecrated and in disarray. Since the Hasmoneans were a priestly family, they undertook to clean the Temple and restore it to its former use. They labored for almost a year and when the Temple was finally clean, Judah declared a great celebration to commemorate the Feast of *Sukkot* that had already passed and which they had not been able to celebrate for the three years they were fighting Antiochus. So, although the Temple was rededicated on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of *Kislev* (more than a month after that year's *Sukkot*), the Jews undertook to celebrate the rededication as a belated *Sukkot* (and *Shemini Atzeret*) for the eight days commanded in Scripture. That is why one of the terms used to describe *Chanukah* is the "Feast of Dedication."

Another term used to describe *Chanukah* is "Festival of Lights." This term is described in Josephus' "Antiquities," and relates to a legend recorded in the *Talmud* which explained the eight-day celebration as being due to a miracle of God. It was said that an amount of sacred oil that was only enough to burn for one day lasted a full eight days until new oil could be produced. As part of the Temple's dedication, it was necessary to light the seven-branch oil *menorah* but, because of the Temple's desecration, only one jar of consecrated oil containing the High Priest's seal was found. The legend explains that, instead of delaying the dedication, the Hasmonean priests chose to light the *menorah* using the one jar of oil they had, and because God blessed it, the oil lasted eight days instead of one. If you stop to think about it, the legend contains an implied criticism of the Hasmoneans who probably should have had the forethought to manufacture the oil sooner. Anyway, that is the origin of the term "Festival of Lights."

With or without the legend of the miracle of the oil, it is an historic fact that the rededication of the Temple occurred and lasted for eight days. That is the reason we celebrate Chanukah using an eight-branch *menorah* called a *chanukiyah* and not a *menorah* that has seven branches such as the one that was lit in the Temple.

Modern *Chanukiyot* are fueled by either oil or candles and have a ninth branch called a *shamash* or servant used to light the other eight. In rabbinical history, it was decided to light *chanukiyot* with cumulatively increasing numbers of candles or oil canisters each night for the eight nights of *Chanukah* so that on the eighth night all eight flames of the *chanukiyah* (in addition to the ninth) are lit. The tradition developed to add the number of flames lit each night from right to left, but to light them from left to right. Because oil was used in the Temple's *menorah*, it has become traditional on Chanukah to eat foods containing oil and foods that are fried in oil. Hence the tradition of eating fried potato *latkes* (pancakes).

Just an interesting bit of trivia: *Dreidl* (*s'vivon* in Hebrew) is a *Chanukah* game that uses a spinning four-sided top where each side of the top contains one of the Hebrew letters נ (*nun*), ג (*gimmel*), ה (*hey*), and ש (*shin*) that stand for "A great miracle happened there." In Israel, however, *dreidlach* are different; there they replace the letter *shin* with a פ (*pey*) to cause the letters of the *dreidl* to mean "A great miracle happened here!"

I began this message by telling you that *Chanukah* is not commanded in Scripture and that is true. However, *Chanukah* is mentioned in Scripture in the Book of John by its name “Feast of Dedication.” In John 10:22-30 we read:

*“Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Yeshua walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Yeshua answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.”*

So, not only was Yeshua present in the Temple during *Chanukah*, but it was during this very feast—the Feast of Dedication, that Yeshua chose to reveal his divine identity and his oneness with The Father.

There are so many traditions connected to *Chanukah* that we can each choose our favorite. It used to be that for me, the tradition of eating potato latkes won hands down. Earlier in the week our sister Sandy sent me an email of a funny comment made by a Jew who was less than impressed with *Chanukah’s* history. He said:

“It all boils down to this: They tried to kill us... They failed. Let’s eat!”

That pretty much describes what my attitude used to be but, as I grew in the Lord, it was *Chanukah’s* theme of rededication of God’s Temple that came to impress me the most. We have already seen how *Chanukah* originated as a belated eight-day celebration of *Sukkot* and a rededication of the Jerusalem Temple. Solomon also took eight days to dedicate the Temple that he built for the Lord. In 2 Chronicles 7:8-9 we read:

*“At that time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt. And on the eighth day they held a sacred assembly, for they observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.”*

Those were physical temples, but God also speaks of our bodies as temples:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

I have discovered that when I am conscious of my body being a Temple of the Holy Spirit, submitted to God’s will and dedicated to his purposes, I hear God’s voice more clearly, am more conscious of walking with God, feel more empowered by him, and am more at peace.

God has impressed upon me that the season of *Chanukah* is an appropriate time (though not the only time) for us to rededicate ourselves to God—our bodies to being Temples of the Holy Spirit. First, we must clean out our bodily Temples of all that has accumulated that is not of God. Second, we must

ask God to fill our newly cleansed Temples with the consecrated oil of the Holy Spirit. Third, we must light up our oil by committing ourselves to a crucified life of service to both God and our fellow man. By doing these things, we will fulfill God's desire for us spoken by Yeshua in Matthew 5:13-16:

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

If we follow Yeshua's instruction and example, we will all be able to walk with God in intimacy, power, and unbroken fellowship. And we will all be able to hear his voice because he guaranteed it by his words in John 10:27:

*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”*

In the same way in which the first *Chanukah* was an extension of *Sukkot*, let us let the next days be OUR extension of *Chanukah*—OUR miracle of lights—that we may be able to testify to the letters on the Israeli *dreidl*: “*nun, gimmel, hey, pey.*” “A great miracle happened here.”

—NKJ

## Day of Messiah's Birth

*Delivered December 23, 2006*

Today is the eighth day of *Chanukah*, and tomorrow night will be Christmas eve. Christmas is not a Jewish holiday; in fact, Christmas is one of the days of the year commonly considered to be the least Jewish and the most Christian. One of the first questions people ask me about Messianic Judaism is whether we celebrate Christmas. Their reason for asking is to try to figure out who we are—to decide whether we are Jews or whether we are Christians. The question has nothing to do with wanting to know about Christmas; it is that in their minds if we do not celebrate Christmas maybe—just maybe—Messianic Judaism is Jewish. But if we do celebrate Christmas, no way! That and the fact that celebrating Yeshua's birth is not commanded in Scripture are why Christmas is not part of Messianic Judaism.

Now I know that this causes some to be surprised—particularly those who come from traditional Christian families and expect the opposite—that if we (Jews or non-Jews) believe in Yeshua we would most certainly celebrate his birth on December 25 along with our brother Christians. But whether we are Jews or affiliated Gentiles, we have come into Messianic Judaism with a very special purpose and calling that includes our testimony that Jews do not stop being Jews when they start believing in Yeshua. So, it is essential that members of Messianic Jewish communities live a Jewish style of life in Yeshua and not one of cultural Christianity. Making this change is indeed a sacrifice for some of us who come from Christian backgrounds.

Now it is a fact that Christmas in America has influenced how we celebrate *Chanukah*. *Chanukah* has sometimes been called the Jewish Christmas. Why? First, because the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month of *Kislev* (*Chanukah*) always falls near the 25<sup>th</sup> of December (Christmas). Second, because, like Christmas, the mood of *Chanukah* is celebratory and is associated with the display of lights. Third, because, like Christmas, we have adopted a tradition of giving gifts during *Chanukah*—especially to the children.

While we strive to be authentically Jewish in how we live, it is also important that we not place stumbling blocks for the Christian Church, because part of our God-given witness is to the Church. We are beholden to the Church because it (and it alone) preserved the New Covenant Scriptures and the truth of Messiah through the ages. But the Church did not have everything right and had (and still has) some things wrong with which we can help. For example, the Church that started off as a sect of Judaism distanced itself from Judaism and establish itself as a replacement of Israel as God's covenant people. From time to time it also turned a blind eye to persecutions of the Jewish people and, even today, much of the Christian Church does not understand how it is related to Israel and how its future and Israel's future are intertwined. Still, Messianic Judaism is beholden to the Christian Church, as our paths have crossed and continue to cross because of our common faith in Yeshua and the reality that the Church continues to contribute much to our knowledge of Messiah, and to bringing the Good News to our Jewish people.

I find this season of *Chanukah* and Christmas an ideal time to consider our relationship with both the Jewish community and also with the Christian Church. It is a time when I like to reminisce about

my own roots in Judaism and also to taste a bit of Christian culture—that part that is truly godly and biblical. And while I am tasting, I often find opportunities to share *my* heritage in Messianic Judaism.

The Christmas season reminds me of the Jewish congratulatory term “*mazel tov*” which literally means “good star constellation.” It invokes astrology to wish someone “good fortune by the stars” or “may the configuration of the stars bring you luck,” and because its meaning is clearly unbiblical, I do not use it. However, at Christmas time it serves to remind me of the star that led the wise men to Yeshua as told in [Matthew 2:1-10](#):

*“Now after Yeshua was born in Bet Lechem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East [His mazel tov<sup>1</sup>] and have come to worship Him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. So they said to him, “In Bet Lechem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bet Lechem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ “Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bet Lechem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.”*

Apparently, there was a *mazel* or constellation containing a bright star that led the wise men to the place of Yeshua's birth; that is why I consider it the only legitimate *mazel tov*.

There is nothing wrong with celebrating Yeshua's birth on December 25 although we are certain that he was not born then. Some say he was born during *Sukkot* and they come to that conclusion through applying extra-biblical information about the seasons and the priesthood. I have a different theory—that he was born in the Spring, and I come to my conclusion exclusively through Scriptural interpretation. Please turn with me to [Luke 1:24-57](#) as we read the account of how Miryam became the mother of Yeshua, the son of God. It is a long passage but well worth our time reading it:

*“Following this, Elisheva his wife conceived, and she remained five months in seclusion, saying, “ADONAI has done this for me; he has shown me favor at this time, so as to remove my public disgrace.” In the sixth month, the angel Gavri'el was sent by God to a city in the Galil called Natzeret, to a virgin engaged to a man named Yosef, of the house of David; the virgin's name was Miryam. Approaching her, the angel said, “Shalom, favored lady! ADONAI is with you!” She was deeply troubled by his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Don't be afraid, Miryam, for you have found favor with God. Look! You will become pregnant, you will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Yeshua. He will be great, he will be called Son of Ha'Elyon. ADONAI, God, will give him the throne of his forefather David; and*

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1 “*Mazel tov*” is my term that I inserted.



*he will rule the House of Ya'akov forever—there will be no end to his Kingdom.” “How can this be,” asked Miryam of the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered her, “The Ruach HaKodesh will come over you, the power of Ha'Elyon will cover you. Therefore the holy child born to you will be called the Son of God. “You have a relative, Elisheva, [Elizabeth] who is an old woman; and everyone says she is barren. But she has conceived a son and is six months pregnant! For with God, nothing is impossible.” Miryam said, “I am the servant of ADONAI; may it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her. Without delay, Miryam set out and hurried to the town in the hill country of Y'hudah where Z'kharyah lived, entered his house and greeted Elisheva. When Elisheva heard Miryam's greeting, the baby in her womb stirred. Elisheva was filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and spoke up in a loud voice, “How blessed are you among women! And how blessed is the child in your womb! “But who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy! Indeed you are blessed, because you have trusted that the promise ADONAI has made to you will be fulfilled.” Then Miryam said, “My soul magnifies ADONAI; and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, who has taken notice of his servant-girl in her humble position. For—imagine it!—from now on, all generations will call me blessed! The Mighty One has done great things for me! Indeed, his name is holy; and in every generation he has mercy on those who fear him. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm, routed the secretly proud, brought down rulers from their thrones, raised up the humble, filled the hungry with good things, but sent the rich away empty. He has taken the part of his servant Isra'el, mindful of the mercy which he promised to our fathers, to Avraham and his seed forever.” Miryam stayed with Elisheva for about three months and then returned home. The time arrived for Elisheva to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son.”*

Notice that the term “in the sixth month” in [verse 26](#) follows our being told in [verse 24](#) that Elizabeth was pregnant for 5 months. Because of this sequence—“5 months”—“sixth month”—there is the natural inclination to think that the expression “in the sixth month” is a continuing reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Another reason we might come to that conclusion is that [verse 36](#) states that Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant when Gabriel visited Miryam. Nevertheless, I suggest that the terms are coincidental. Almost everywhere in the Bible that the phrase “in the \_\_\_ month” appears, it is defining a lunar calendar month—nothing else. Here are three examples:

[Exodus 12:18](#): *“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.”*

Here the phrase “in the first month” refers to the lunar month of *Nisan*.

[Leviticus 16:29](#): *“This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.”*

Here the phrase “in the seventh month” refers to the lunar month of *Tishrei*.

[Esther 3:7](#): *“In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.”*

Here the phrase “In the first month” defines itself as being the lunar month of *Nisan*.

So, it is reasonable that in Luke 1:26, the words “in the sixth month” means that Gabriel visited Miryam in the sixth month of the year (the month of *Elul*) which was coincidentally the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. According to verses 40-44, Miryam was already pregnant when she arrived at Elizabeth's home; it is implied because Elizabeth's baby leapt in her womb when it perceived the presence of Yeshua in Miryam's womb.<sup>2</sup> Logically then, Miryam was impregnated by the Holy Spirit between the time of Gabriel's visit and her having arrived at Elizabeth's home—most probably right after Gabriel's visit. Assuming a normal 9-month pregnancy in a 12-month year, Yeshua's birth would have occurred in the third month of the following year or the month of *Sivan*, which is when *Shavuot* occurs—in the Spring. In the less likely case that that particular year had a leap month, Yeshua's birth would have fallen in *Iyyar*, a month earlier but still in the Spring season.

Well, this is all interesting, and maybe I have convinced you and maybe not. What I wanted to accomplish though, was to spend this time as a way of connecting with our Christian brothers and sisters who will shortly be celebrating the birth of Yeshua. *Chanukah* is not, of course, the Jewish Christmas, but rather a Festival of Lights, and as John 1:9-12 reminds us:

*“That [referring to Yeshua] was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:”*

And in John 8:12 Yeshua said of himself:

*“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”*

Yes, this season does, in a way, join *Chanukah* and Christmas. It reminds us that those of us who celebrate *Chanukah* and those of us who celebrate Christmas have a destiny that is joined by our common faith in Yeshua.

Paul warns the Gentile Church in Romans 11:18:

*“Do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.”*

It is important that our Messianic Jewish community not boast because we are historically indebted to the Christian Church. Our calling to be a light to the nations requires that we bless the Christian Church as often as, and in every way, that we can.

—NKJ

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth's baby would not have leapt had he not sensed the Holy Spirit-induced pregnancy within Miryam.

## **Christmas and Messianic Judaism**

*Delivered December 22, 2007*

There is no getting around it. This is the Christmas season, and in the “US of A,” December 25 is Christmas. People who know me as a Messianic Jewish leader sometimes ask me whether I recognize the legitimacy of Christmas and my answer is “Yes!” Now depending upon who asks me the question, they would either be happy with my answer or thoroughly dismayed. Christians who ask me usually like the answer because it says to them that I am a “Christian” like they are. However, Jews from the wider Jewish community would not like my answer because it tends to say to them that I have left Judaism, have become a “Christian,” and am now falsely calling myself a Jew. To avoid either of these misunderstandings, I do not leave my answer at just “Yes,” but give more of an explanation.

Jewish unbelievers in Yeshua and Christians are not the only ones who ask me whether I recognize Christmas. I am also occasionally asked by Jewish and Gentile Messianic believers who are exploring their own attitudes toward Christmas or have written Christmas off as “not Jewish.” They are unsettled by discovering that some of their *mishpochah* in Messianic Judaism acknowledge or even celebrate it.

Except for a brief account of Yeshua’s birth, the Scriptures are silent about Christmas, so everything I say about it needs to be taken as my opinion and nothing more. So, if you’re ready, here goes.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s re-emergence of Jewish belief in Yeshua, Jews who believed, found themselves beleaguered by their angry families and an antagonistic Rabbinical Judaism that cried “traitor!” “You are no longer a Jew!” “You are a Christian!” In some ways they were right, because when Jews in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century began to come to faith, they did not build Messianic Jewish congregations. They started by joining Christian Churches, wearing crosses, and calling themselves “Christians.”

Now most Jews did not know much about Christians or “Jesus” as they called him (and still do); their understanding was mostly:

1. Jesus was the blue-eyed, fair-haired man-god of the Christians.
2. If you were a Christian you were not a Jew. If you started as a Jew and came to believe in Jesus, you were no longer a Jew.
3. Christians persecuted Jews.
4. Christians ate stuff that Jews could do not eat.
5. The way to tell a Christian from a Jew was to find out if he celebrated Christmas and Easter.
6. To know if a person celebrated Christmas you looked to see if he had a tree in his living room and lights strung on the outside of his house.

The next stage in the development of Messianic Judaism was Hebrew Christianity. Some Evangelical Christian churches found themselves with Jewish members that they did not know what to do with because they still acted and talked like Jews. They decided it would be good for their church to start a “Mission to the Jews” by allowing the Jewish members in their midst to conduct events on Jewish holidays, to start small groups with Jewish themes, and to eventually start congregations that had Jewish rituals in them. These congregations came to be known as “Hebrew-Christian congregations,” and the movement in which they found themselves became known as “Hebrew Christianity.” Note the emphasis on “Christianity.” A Jew who came to faith as part of this movement was considered a Hebrew-Christian and, in many cases, just a Christian. And because celebrating Christmas with trees and lights was so much a part of Christian culture, the Jewish Christians undoubtedly had them in their homes at Christmas time. Although the Jew in a Hebrew-Christian congregation may have endured personal rejections and attacks because of his new-found faith, he felt secure in his identity as a “Christian.”

The next advance toward Messianic Judaism leads us to where we are now. Within Hebrew Christianity, the Jewish members of some congregations began to sense a lack of authenticity in what they were doing. Furthermore, some of the churches that had spawned them dealt with them unwisely by imposing Christian culture, practices, and theologies that they perceived to be foreign. These Jewish believers, few at first, found each other and, one by one, seceded from their church affiliations and Christian denominations. They formed what became known as “Messianic Jewish” congregations, and the movement they founded became known as “Messianic Judaism.”

These new Messianic Jewish congregations were different from the Hebrew Christian ones in that the Jews that joined them considered themselves “Jewish” (not “Christian”). To emphasize their “Jewishness” and to distinguish themselves from the Hebrew Christian congregations, they incorporated an array of Rabbinical Jewish symbols and religious practices and threw away every Christian symbol and practice they could. It included removing Christian terminology, Christian music, Christian liturgy, and the display of crosses. Most importantly, they ceased to celebrate Christmas and Easter in order to identify as “Messianic Jewish” instead of “Hebrew-Christian.” It was a purge of all things visibly Christian except for the Lord’s Table and certain music which survived. Christmas trees, Christmas music, and Christmas lights did not survive.

It seemed that reordering things to be more Jewish would help the Jewish members of Messianic Jewish congregations to feel more secure in their Jewish identities. Unfortunately, the opposite was true. Before the change to Messianic Judaism, Gentile Christians understood that Hebrew-Christians were part of the universal Church and they embraced them. After the change, many Christians regarded the Messianic Jews as having left the body of believers. They mistrusted them, as the Messianic Jews seemed to have compromised their Christian faith and had returned to the synagogue of unbelievers. The remaining Hebrew-Christians did not help either, as they held to their view that Jews who believed in Jesus should remain connected to and loyal to the Christian Church. The biggest rejection and opposition, however, came from the wider Jewish community. Before the change to Messianic Judaism, the worst that the Jewish establishment could say about the Hebrew-Christians was that when they came to faith in Yeshua they stopped being Jews. After the change, however, attacks against the Messianic Jews from the Jewish community became fierce. Previously

they were considered non-Jews, but they were now considered non-Jews masquerading as Jews, luring “real” Jews away from the synagogue and converting them to Christianity through trickery.

So, the early Messianic Jews got it from all sides. Many of their families rejected them, the Christians either rejected them or mistrusted them, the remaining Hebrew-Christians did likewise, and the Jewish establishment not only disenfranchised them as Jews but accused them of being deceptive traitors and a threat to normative Judaism. While there was a great sense of exhilaration being at the forefront of a pioneer movement, there was also a great deal of confusion and uncertainty regarding their Jewish identity. The result was that things Christian—especially the celebration of Christmas in any form—was fiercely resisted. I can testify to these things from my own experience, because I came into modern Messianic Judaism in 1977.

So, here we are in the year 2007 and, while some things have changed, some are still as they were. One thing that has changed is that more Gentiles have joined the Messianic Jewish movement. While we are still the subject of derision and discrimination by the wider Jewish community, Messianic Judaism has gotten a foothold in Israel, has found acceptance by much of the Church, and is more widely known and accepted overall. What has not changed is that some of us, both Jews and affiliated Gentiles, are still insecure in our identities and are fearful of things Christian within our congregations. Some of the Jews among us see Christian things as threatening to our Jewish authenticity and to the purity of our “Jewish Space.” Some of the Gentiles among us who left Christian churches to join Messianic Judaism see it the same way. Both of these groups tend to reject even remnants of Christianity in our midst as being “un Jewish” (they themselves are not Jewish) and a threat to Jewish identity. The decorations associated with Christmas are among the greatest offenders, and during the Christmas season there are annoyances when some Messianic believers choose to have Christmas trees, Christmas ornaments, and Christmas music in their homes.

So, now that I have given you the background and laid out the problem, let me say some things about them and give you the solution. I will take them out of order by giving the solution first; the solution is Matthew 7:1-2 followed by James 5:9:

*“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”*

*“Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”*

The solution is simple. Do not judge your brother regarding these things. Permit me to share with you how I, as a Messianic Jewish leader, perceive Christmas.

First, we all know that Yeshua was not born on December 25, and that the celebration of Christmas is neither commanded nor explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Christmas came about as part of early Christianity’s attempt to distance itself from Judaism by creating a new calendar that set Christmas on December 25 to coincide with the Romans’ worship of Saturn. Christmas trees originated in the Nordic feast of Yule, mistletoe was considered magical, and decorations have nothing to do with

Yeshua. Santa Claus is of course a fiction, and many people who set up trees and string lights around their houses do not believe in anything.

Remember, at the beginning of this message I said that I am sometimes asked whether I recognize the legitimacy of Christmas and I answer “Yes!” At Christmas time I read about and contemplate the importance of Yeshua’s birth, and I tend to give messages about it. In the past I have looked up old friends, volunteered in homeless shelters and soup kitchens, have given charitably to Christian causes, and during this season I like to hear Christmas songs that tell of Yeshua and the holiness of his birth. When people talk about the Christmas spirit, I feel it with a capital “S,” and especially when I am around serious Christian believers.

Let me now address some negatives. We have to accept—it is a reality—that Christmas was hijacked by unbelievers and turned into a secular holiday. Okay, I say: “So what?” I can enjoy Christmas for its holy significance and can enjoy secular things as well, so long as they are not sinful. Was it sinful to intentionally set the celebration of Christmas on December 25 to coincide with the heathen day of worship *Saturnelia*? It was done for the community’s protection, but it may have been sinful because, in doing so, the early Gentile believers sought to deny their covenantal connection to their Jewish brethren. But is it sinful for us to celebrate the birth of Yeshua on December 25 today? Only if we are still trying to identify with the feast of *Saturnelia* and deny our Jewish connection. That certainly does not apply to me and I am sure not to you.

Are Christmas trees, mistletoe and ornaments sinful? That depends on whether or not one believes that we can redeem sinful symbols for non-sinful purposes. I do. If you do not, then I guess you will discard all Christmas symbolism, but then on the Jewish side, you should also discard welcoming the Sabbath bride, lighting Sabbath lights with waving hands, singing *L’cha Dodi*, covering your eyes when praying the *Sh’ma*, and a whole host of other Jewish traditions that have their origins in Jewish mysticism or have been influenced by it. Do Christmas trees have any spiritual significance? No, but if none is imputed to it, where is the harm? They are pretty, and for some families—even Messianic families—they are needed for significant family reasons such as continuing longstanding family traditions. Do I think that the Holy Spirit instructs people to have Christmas Trees? No, I do not.

As for tree decorations, they have an intended biblical origin that dates back to when Christians hung apples on their Christmas trees to symbolize the Garden of Eden—a mere step away from using ornaments to give the same appearance. Santa Claus, with his magical powers, all-knowing ability, omni-presence, and rewarding children whom he judges to be “good,” is a clear substitute for God and is not good. Do I have a Christmas Tree in my house at Christmas time? No, and neither do I have any decorative lights other than *Chanukah* lights. It is *my* choice that represents *my* desire to project *my* identity to the world as being a Jew. If there were a significant family reason to do otherwise, perhaps I would do otherwise. Perhaps you do otherwise, and that is okay.

Christmas ornaments displayed in our services or in our congregational building are unacceptable for the same reason that I have chosen not to have them in my home. We are a Jewish congregation, and we should present ourselves that way. However, if ornamentation were requested by the church that shares this building, it would be a matter of judgment for the elders—not an automatic “no.” We might say “yes!”

Bottom line: If you visit a Messianic Jewish believer during the Christmas season and encounter Christmas lights or a Christmas Tree, do not freak out! Many come to Messianic Judaism from families and from a world that keeps a Christmas-Tree Christmas, and breaking with that tradition at this particular time may not be good for them. As for your children observing others celebrating Christmas with trees and lights and wanting to do likewise, explain to them that your family has chosen a Jewish style of life and that other families, for their own reasons, have not. Part of training up children is teaching them about diversity, tolerance, and not coveting their neighbor's Christmas Tree. 😊

I was puzzling over a light way to conclude this message, and the thought came to me to do it by singing this song that I composed to the well-known tune of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer:"

Rudolph the red-nosed rabbi,  
Had a shiny Jewish nose.  
And if you ever saw it,  
You would be convinced it glows.

All of the other rabbis  
Used to laugh and call him names.  
They never let Rav Rudolph  
Play their Jewish *dreidel* games.

Then one foggy *Chanukah*,  
The elders came to say,  
Rav Rudolph with your nose so bright  
Won't you light our *Chanukah* light?

Since then the Rabbis loved him,  
As they shouted out with glee,  
Rudolph the red-nosed rabbi,  
You've-made Messianic history!

—NKJ

## **Christmas and The Tri-Unity of God**

*Delivered December 25, 2010*

Although Messianic Jewish congregations do not celebrate Christmas, messages given on the *Shabbat* closest to Christmas often allude to the holiday as a way of reminding ourselves of our connection to the Christian world through our common faith in Yeshua. We do this with some discomfort though because Jews generally do not celebrate Christmas, although I hasten to admit that, here in the United States, many have picked up on the festive and commercial aspects of it. It is not unheard of to find Jewish homes with Christmas decorations and even trees with presents beneath them. But these are typically the homes of Jews who have assimilated into secular society; religious Jews in the wider Jewish community do not acknowledge Christmas in any visible way.

This avoidance of Christmas is a reality even for us Messianic Jews because of its association with Christianity that brings with it a foreign culture and an association with persecutions either committed by or permitted by the Christian Church. We have an additional problem with it because we continue to fight against the accusation of the wider Jewish community (and sometimes even our families) that we have ceased being Jews and have become Christians because of our belief in Yeshua. We say it is not so, but if we are seen celebrating Christmas—one of the two uniquely Christian observances—it all but proves it to them. In stark contrast, some of us are pulled in the other direction by family members who have either married Christians or have assimilated into secular America. In such cases, we are sometimes drawn uncomfortably into their celebrations of Christmas on some level.

As I prayed about what to say today, two things came to me. First, how odd it is that God chose to send himself to us born as a baby instead of just appearing to us as an adult. Second, how ironic it is that Christmas (forget the date accuracy issue) has developed into an elaborate birthday party for a Jew contrary to the Jewish custom of his day. There is considerable evidence that, in antiquity, Jewish births were celebrated with great joy, but annual Jewish birthdays were not. For example, the only mention in Scripture of a birthday celebration for an adult is the one for Pharaoh recorded in Genesis 40:20. And the only occurrence of birthdays in the *Talmud* is in Mishnah Avodah Zarah 3:1 which refers to pagan rulers. Nowhere do we see annual birthday celebrations for Jews in the ancient world. In pointing this out, understand that I am not saying there is anything wrong with birthday celebrations; they have certainly become common among today's Jews. I just think it is ironic.

Now the matter of Yeshua coming to us as a baby is interesting. Yeshua is sometimes referred to as the “second Adam,” but Adam was created as an adult, so there is no analogy there. It might have been God's accommodation to the Jewish understanding of the day that the expected Messiah would be fully human and that his lineage would be traceable to David through natural birth. Or perhaps it has to do with Yeshua having to experience everything that other men experience, including having both an earthly and a heavenly father. We cannot know unless God reveals it. Scholars may someday discover the actual date of Yeshua's birth, but I suspect that even when all Israel finally comes to know him, Christmas will not be embraced as a celebration by Jews.

Despite what I have said, I do see value in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century recognition of Christmas. For one thing, it is the one time of the year when we pay special attention to the biblical details of Yeshua's birth,



and that alone is of great value. For me, the most fascinating aspect of that is how God impregnated Miryam with his own seed so that Yeshua would grow to be his human son in whom would reside both the fullness of the deity and Jewish identity. Let me read Luke 1:26-35, which are the verses I find most pertinent to this:

*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Miryam. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.*

*Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Miryam, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name YESHUA. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Miryam said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."*

This account rivals science fiction in challenging the boundaries of our comprehension and, at the same time, causing all of Scripture to hang together with consistency. It provides a way to understand the tri-unity of God—how God can be both one and plural—a very difficult concept that I will share with you in a few minutes.

People talk a lot about the "Christmas Spirit" and, except in for what takes place in the shopping malls, I think it has validity. During the week that precedes Christmas there is a change in the air as our attention is drawn to higher godly values such as love, compassion, charity, peace, hope, and faith. It ought to be that way all year long and every day but, since it is not, it is well that this season brings it out. I think I can capture what the Christmas Spirit is by stringing together certain Scriptures; it is a long reading, but it is important:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13: *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup>bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we*

*see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

*1 John 3:16-24: “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Yeshua the Messiah and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.*

*Galatians 5:22-26: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Messiah’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

*Mark 12:29-31: “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

That’s it! I understand if you are skeptical that Christmas really brings these virtues to the forefront, and you may say that the thoughts and the words are nice but what change does that make in us? Well, I see an indication that many people’s moods and behaviors change for the better during the Christmas season as we are impacted by the colorful lights, the jingle of bells, and the non-stop movies, stories, and songs that convey moral messages.

I said I would share my understanding of the triune nature of God and I will attempt to do so, but for you to understand it you will have to let your imagination soar. It is a model taken from biology, so those of you who studied biology in High School will have an advantage. A model is an inexact copy of something that can tell us something about the real item. I therefore enlist your patience as I temporarily digress into teaching biology, but I promise to come back to Luke 1 and tie it all together.

I visualize the triune God in heaven as being analogous to an amoeba—a one-celled protozoan that has two nuclei floating in a sea of cytoplasm.

Wait! Don’t leave! Hear me out!

An amoeba has one nucleus, but imagine it with two, one larger and more dominant than the other. The nuclei communicate with each other via the amoeba's cytoplasm which is a gel-like fluid in which they are both embedded. Amoebae can change their shape at will by sending out tentacles of their cytoplasm called pseudopods that allow them to move and interact with their environment. Imagine that the larger nucleus of an amoeba is God the Father, the smaller nucleus is God the Son (the Word), and the amoeba's cytoplasm is God the Holy Spirit. The entire amoeba represents God—one God—but triune because, although we are describing a single amoeba, the amoeba is the sum total of its two nuclei and its cytoplasm in the same way that God is the sum total of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The amoeba's two nuclei and cytoplasm always work together because they communicate through their common interface, the amoeba's gel-like cytoplasm. Similarly, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit always work together because they communicate through *their* common interface which is the amorphous Holy Spirit. If you remove any of the components of the amoeba, the result ceases to be an amoeba. In the same way, if you remove the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit from God, God is no longer God.

I hope you have the picture clear so far because there is a bit more to this analogy before we return to Luke. God's normal way of being omnipresent on earth is through the Holy Spirit whose nature it is to be fluid—similar to the amoeba's cytoplasm. And like an amoeba, the Holy Spirit can project stalk-like tentacles (extensions of himself) from heaven to earth, and cover an entire geographic area, a single person, or multiple persons, without ever disconnecting himself from the rest of God who remains in Heaven. That is the mechanism by which God communicated with the prophets of old. The Holy Spirit lowered a tentacle of himself upon a prophet, all the while maintaining a connection to the Father and the Son in Heaven. And as the prophet moved about on the earth, the tentacle of the Holy Spirit moved with him, all the while staying connected to God in Heaven. And if there were more prophets that needed to be communicated with, separate but identical tentacles of the Holy Spirit were provided for each of them. With this model in mind, we can see why even non-prophets received power and were able to prophesy when they came close to a prophet and under the umbrella of a Holy Spirit tentacle.

Now back to Luke. In chapter 1, verse 25, the angel tells Miryam:

*“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”*

We know that Miryam was impregnated shortly after the Holy Spirit's visit because she was already with child when she embarked on her journey to visit Elizabeth. According to the model I just described, what actually occurred was that the Holy Spirit lowered a tentacle extension of himself down upon Miryam, and God the Son descended through the tentacle and implanted himself, as a seed, into Miryam's womb. At no time in this process—even while inside Miryam, was the Son ever separated from the Father who remained in Heaven, because the Holy Spirit did not withdraw his extension from Miryam.

When Yeshua was born, the Holy Spirit's extension followed him out of Miryam's womb, and another and separate Holy Spirit extension was provided for Miryam. As Yeshua grew to adulthood

and moved about on earth, the Holy Spirit moved with him and communicated every emotion and thought of his to the Father; that is why Yeshua could say as quoted in John 14:10-11:

*“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”*

And also, as he said in John 10:30 and almost got stoned for it:

*“I and My Father are one.”*

Yeshua remained connected to the Father via the Holy Spirit throughout his life except for one moment while he was awaiting death on the cross and cried out:

Matthew 27:46: *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

In that moment, the Holy Spirit withdrew himself from Yeshua, leaving him, for the first time in his life, to experience separation from God the Father. It was a necessary consequence of Yeshua taking upon himself the sins of the world.

Connection to the Father through the Holy Spirit returned to Yeshua shortly after he was resurrected to life, and he never again had to experience such a separation. Yeshua walked the earth and taught his disciples for forty days, at which time he was taken up to be in his original place at the right hand of the Father. Following through with my amoeba model, my conception of how this happened is that the extension of the Holy Spirit that cloaked Yeshua and kept him connected to the Father retracted and lifted him up to Heaven. Then, following through on his promise that after he left he would send another, when *Shavuot* arrived, tentacles of the Holy Spirit descended upon many in Jerusalem. For the first time, all of mankind was granted the ability to connect to the Father and Son directly through the Holy Spirit in the same way as the prophets of old.

I trust that neither God nor any of you will view my comparing God to the lowly amoeba as sacrilegious. I credit God himself with giving me the model I described in order to help me understand his triune nature. I leave it for you to discern and I end now with a prayer that this message will give you a better understanding of how Jews relate to Christmas, and a conceptual model of God's triune nature.

—NKJ

## **The Feasts and Christianity**

### **Restoring a Biblical Truth to the Church!**

*Delivered April 17, 2011*

Today is Palm Sunday, the day that Christianity commemorates Yeshua's arrival in Jerusalem on a donkey amidst the waving of Palm branches and shouts of "*Hoshanah!*" by his followers ([John 12:12-15](#)). Tomorrow is the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month on the biblical lunar calendar, the month of *Nissan*, which makes it the day preceding Passover—the evening of Yeshua's last supper with his disciples. They were gathered to remember when God's final plague on Egypt slew Pharaoh's son who was heir to the throne and expected to become a god among Egypt's many other deities.

It was an event of national birth and salvation for the children of Israel whose firstborn sons were not slain as were the Egyptians' sons, provided they trusted God and put the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorposts of their houses as Moses instructed them. The following day, the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Nissan*, the children of Israel, accompanied by Egyptians who believed in the God of Moses, began their exodus that was to lead them through the red sea and toward the Promised Land that we now call *Eretz Yisrael*—the Land of Israel. Here are some passages from the Bible that speak of this event:

*Exodus 12:29-39: "And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves."*

*Leviticus 23:4-11: "These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel,*

*and say to them: `When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.`*

We see, through these Scriptures, the historical context of Passover that occurs on the evening of *Nissan* 14, followed by seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is also the celebration of Firstfruits, which Leviticus 23 says is on the day following the “Sabbath,” which many take to mean the Sunday following the seventh-day Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Now this is very prophetic, pointing to Yeshua’s last Passover meal, his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God, and his resurrection during the night on Sunday, the Day of Firstfruits. That does not always fall on the day the Christian calendar calls Easter (the day assigned by the early Church as Yeshua’s resurrection day), but it logically follows from the biblical account, and also from Yeshua being the “firstfruit” of the resurrection of the saints. 1 Corinthians 15:20 says it this way:

*“But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*

Many of us here are familiar with most of this history and its connection to the bread and wine of the Lord. I wonder, however, how many believers who are not Jewish have considered that this connects them (as Yeshua’s modern-day disciples) to the Jewish people of the First Century, and therefore to the Jewish people of today! Christianity was originally considered a sect of Judaism, mostly populated by Jews who believed that Yeshua was the Messiah. It was after Yeshua’s resurrection that non-Jews joined their Jewish brothers in the faith.

The history and relevance of Passover to Christianity should cause Christians to realize that their biblical history does not originate with Yeshua. It goes way back to at least the original Passover and exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, and even further. Consider, for example, what God said to Abraham in Genesis 17:4-7:

*“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”*

Members of the church come from the “many nations” to which God referred when He gave that covenant to Abraham. So, if you think of Abraham as your “Father Abraham,” you would be right. Here are verses of later Scripture that confirm and connect to Yeshua’s sacrifice and resurrection; we read Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 4, verses 16-25:

*“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, “I have made you a father of many*

*nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Yeshua our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”*

So, if your history as a Gentile Christian goes back to your father Abraham, and Abraham is also the father of the Jewish people, then Gentile Christians and Jews have the same father in Abraham and are therefore brothers. Notice that I said “Jews” and not “Messianic Jews.” Your brotherhood that originates with Abraham is with all Jews—not just with those of us who have come to faith in Yeshua. In Romans 8:14-17, Paul describes the Christian’s adoption through faith and then, in Romans 9:3-7, his own adoption through being a Jew; in doing so he indicates that his physical adoption is not the ultimate of what counts:

Romans 8:14-17: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”*

Romans 9:3-7: *“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Messiah for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Messiah came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”*

Romans 11 is too long for me to read in its entirety, but I will read verses 13-24 because they are so important:

*“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support*

*the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?”*

Romans 11 explains adoption as our being branches on an olive tree that is owned by physical Israel. Those of us who are born as Jews start off on the tree because it is our tree, but we are broken off if we deny the messiahship of Yeshua. Those who are not born as Jews but come to faith in Yeshua are grafted into the tree that belongs to Israel, and Jews who were earlier broken off, if they come to faith, are re-connected to their tree, also as grafted branches. In other words, while we are not all Jews, all who are of faith are part of a Jewish olive tree that Ephesians 2:11-22 refers to as the “Commonwealth of Israel:”

*“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Yeshua the Messiah Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*

I started off talking about Passover and digressed to explaining how Christians are in a family relationship with Jews. It was not accidental that I did this, just as it was not accidental that Yeshua chose a Passover meal to explain the bread and wine as symbols of his broken body and his blood poured out for our sins. Today, more than at any time in history since the First Century, Christians are re-acquainting themselves with the “appointed times” in Scripture—the Sabbaths and annual days of commemoration that God commanded to the Israelites—days that Jews have kept throughout the centuries but that most in the Christian Church have not because they considered them “Jewish Holidays,” part of the Mosaic Law, and therefore not for Christians. Passover is one of the appointed times, but there are also the first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, the Spring harvest of Weeks (that the Church calls *Pentecost*), the Day of Blowing Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the first and eighth days of the Feast of Tabernacles—nine in all and then, of course,



there is the weekly Sabbath. The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) has long been recognized by the Church as the day when the Holy Spirit first fell and, more recently, the Feast of Tabernacles and Passover have received the Church's attention. But all the commanded days in Scripture are relevant to us because 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, and I quote:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Christians do not have to celebrate these “appointed times” in the same way as Jews, but neither should they ignore them.

What I am bringing you today is an even deeper message than the relevance of Passover or any other day on the calendar. Through faith in Messiah Yeshua, all Christians are related biblically as brothers and sisters to the Jewish people.

—New King James

## Independence Day and God

*Delivered July 5, 2008*

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress in Philadelphia officially separated the thirteen New World colonies from English rule by enacting this resolution:

*“...that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved.”*

Responding to the awesomeness of the occasion, John Adams who would become our second president, wrote this acknowledgement of God to his wife:

*“The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty.”*

The Declaration of Independence was signed two days later on July 4, and it is that second day that has since been known in the United States of America as “Independence Day.”

Yesterday was July 4, the anniversary of the declaration of America’s independence from England, and every year that we celebrate we should remember that even at the very moment of our Nation’s birth, God was on the lips of its founding fathers. It is easy to forget, because each year the secular media does all it can to revise American history, hoping that we will forget God’s part in it. I experienced an example of it yesterday as I watched the History Channel’s otherwise laudable account of our struggle for independence and heard the statement of John Adams, that I read to you a minute ago but with its reference to God omitted. They achieved this remarkable disappearance of God by leaving out Adams’ third sentence, and joining his second sentence to his fourth, to produce this:

*“The Second Day of July 1776 will be the most memorable epoch in the History of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival... . It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.”*

This same quotation (with God omitted) appeared on page 25 of in this year’s July 2 Washington Post, but at least the Post had the decency to insert dots to mark the place of omission.

I am bringing this to your attention for two reasons. First, to do my small part in helping to restore God to his rightful place in our history. Second, to alert us to a conspiracy that is designed to desensitize us, over time, to God’s rightful place in our American identity. The conspirators are not only the Washington Post and the History Channel; Satan is one of the conspirators and he knows exactly what he is doing. The media also know

what they are doing, but they do not realize that they are doing it as pawns of Satan. And why should they? They seem not to believe in God, so why should they believe in Satan?

The myth being perpetrated is that The United States of America is and always has been a secular country in which God has had no public place. The expression “separation of church and state” is taught as though it is part of the U.S. constitution, but here is what is actually in our Constitution as part of the First Amendment:

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; ...”*

If that is what is meant as “separation of church and state,” then I am for it because it protects us from our government establishing a state religion. Only when God’s sovereignty of Israel’s government is fully recognized and bowed down to, will a state religion be appropriate.

At this time of the year, it helps to be reminded of how much God has impacted our country, so here are some random facts:

1. The words “In God we Trust” first appeared on a United States coin in 1864, and was adopted as the country’s official motto in 1956.
2. The country’s first “Pledge of Allegiance” was composed in 1892 without mention of God. Then in 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower approved adding the words “under God,” and said regarding it:

*“In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource in peace and war.”*

3. George Washington, the Father of our Nation and its first president, was a Christian. In his farewell speech on September 19, 1796 he said:

*“It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible. Of all the dispositions and habits that lead to political prosperity, our religion and morality are the indispensable supporters. Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that our national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”*

4. Our third president, Thomas Jefferson, wrote these words in his Bible:

*“I am a Christian, that is to say a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator and, I hope, to the pure doctrine of Jesus also.”*

5. Calvin Coolidge, our 30th President, wrote:

*“The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.”*

6. In 1776, Patrick Henry wrote:

*“It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the Gospel of Messiah Yeshua. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here.”*

There are an endless number of quotations I could cite testifying of our founding fathers' faith in God, but let me instead go back to the fourth of July of 1776, and read the first, second, and last paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence. Although the Declaration is intended as a political document, please take note that it begins and ends with references to God and our nation's need to rely upon him.

Paragraph 1:

*When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

Paragraph 2:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.*

Last Paragraph:

*We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.*

*Signed by order and in behalf of the Congress,*

***JOHN HANCOCK, President***

That was then, and now is now, and some circumstances have changed. One circumstance that has not changed, however, is the need for our country to boldly proclaim God as its creator and protector.

Proverbs 3:5-6 teaches:

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”*

That is an exhortation to nations as well as to individuals. And Zechariah 14:16 prophesies of the nations:

*“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”*

We of the United States are one of those nations whose destiny it is to accompany Israel in worshipping the King. We are blessed to have a head start on many nations who have never been taught about Yeshua and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so let us not waste our advantage. We are in a war for the hearts and minds of our citizenry because we are surrounded by an atheistic media and others who are relentless in their attempts to hide the godliness of our origins, pervert the facts of our history, and discourage us from trusting God. They will not be successful because we already know the truth and are fortified by it. However, our children are at risk—especially those who attend public schools—because each day in school their information comes solely from secular sources that teach unbelief. That is why it is critical that we who are parents spend every spare moment teaching our children God’s truths and God’s ways, for Proverbs 22:6 entreats us:

*“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

At least once a year, usually at this time, I am moved by patriotic songs that remind me of how much God is part of the history of these United States that I call home. I would like to share some of them with you and, if you are so inclined, please join me.

### **America the Beautiful**

Lyrics by Katherine Lee Bates

Music by Samuel Ward

*O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!*

*America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!*

*O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved, [loved],  
And mercy more than life.*

*America! America!  
May God thy gold refine  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And ev'ry gain divine.*

### **Battle Hymn of the Republic**

Lyrics by Julia Ward Howe

Music: "John Brown's Body"

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;  
His truth is marching on.*

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.*

*I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;  
His day is marching on.*

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His day is marching on.*

*I have read a fiery Gospel writ in burnished rows of steel;  
"As ye deal with My contemners, so with you My grace shall deal";  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with His heel,  
Since God is marching on.*

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Since God is marching on.*

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat;  
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet;  
Our God is marching on.*

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Our God is marching on.*

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free;  
[originally: ...let us die to make men free]  
While God is marching on.*

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! While God is marching on.*

*He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,  
He is wisdom to the mighty, He is honor to the brave;  
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of wrong His slave,  
Our God is marching on.*

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Our God is marching on.*

### **God Bless America**

by Irving Berlin

*God Bless America,  
Land that I love.  
Stand beside her and guide her  
Thru the night with a light from above.  
From the mountains, to the prairies,  
To the oceans, white with foam  
God bless America, My home sweet home.*

Today, as in the years following 1776 and in many wars since, young Americans are putting their lives on the line, fighting an enemy to keep America free. Their service may be in Iraq or Afghanistan, or elsewhere, but they are serving in the spirit of 1776 so that our national independence and liberty declared back then will not be lost in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of those in the U.S. military today are related to us personally or through our congregational family, so it is entirely appropriate that we pause at this time to pray for their safety, and the success of their mission.

[Intercessory Prayer]

Let us conclude by singing the second stanza of our National Anthem, the Star Spangled Banner:

**Star Spangled Banner (stanza 2)**

Lyrics by Francis Scott Key

Music by John Stafford Smith

*Oh, thus be it ever when free men shall stand,  
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation;  
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land  
Praise the Power that has made and preserved us as a nation.  
Then conquer we must, when our cause is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust";  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.*

—New King James



## Iran, Persia, and Purim

*Delivered March 3, 2012*

I am going to tell you some things about *Purim* that may surprise you. First, the celebration of *Purim* was not commanded by God; it was merely declared at the end of the Book of Esther as a memorial of God's intervention to save the Jewish people from destruction during the Babylonian exile. This is what is written about the origins of *Purim*; it is a little long, but hang in there while I read it to you:

*Esther 9:20-32: "Mordekhai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all the provinces of King Achashverosh, both near and far, instructing them to observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day, every year, [to commemorate] the days on which the Jews obtained rest from their enemies and the month which for them was turned from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; they were to make them days of celebrating and rejoicing, sending portions [of food] to each other and giving gifts to the poor. So the Jews took it upon themselves to continue what they had already begun to do, and as Mordekhai had written to them; because Haman the son of Hamdata the Agagi, the enemy of the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had thrown pur (that is, "cast lots") to crush and destroy them; but when Ester came before the king, he ordered by letters that [Haman's] wicked scheme, which he had plotted against the Jews, should recoil on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. This is why these days have been called Purim, after the word pur. Thus, because of everything written in this letter, and what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had come upon them, the Jews resolved and took upon themselves, their descendants and all who might join them that without fail they would observe these two days in accordance with what was written in [this letter] and at the appointed time, every year; and that these days would be remembered and observed throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and that these days of Purim would never cease among the Jews or their memory be lost by their descendants. Then Ester the queen, the daughter of Avichayil, and Mordekhai the Jew, gave full written authority to confirm a second letter about Purim. He sent copies of it to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Achashverosh, ensuring their peace and security and requiring the observance of these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordekhai the Jew and Ester the queen had enjoined them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants concerning the matters of fasting and lamenting. At Ester's order these matters of Purim were confirmed and put in writing in the book."*

So, the annual celebration of *Purim* was not commanded by God, but rather by Mordechai, and subsequently endorsed by Esther and King *Achashverosh*, who was not even a Jew. Not only that, but the Book of Esther is one of two books of the Bible in which God's name is not mentioned or referred to even once. The Book of Esther does not even say that Esther prayed; it only says she fasted, and we assume that she prayed. If all this causes you pause, it is no wonder, because these are the very reasons why the Book of Esther almost missed making it into the *Tanach* when the Jewish Canon of Scripture was decided upon.

Now I started this message from the end of the Book of Esther without first laying a foundation of what came before. If I read the entire book to you we will be here for quite a long time, so I will give you a condensed version instead:

**MY PURIM SONG**

**by Michael Rudolph**

**Composed February 2010**

*To the tune of “Bingo was His Name-O”*

There was a queen, a stubborn little queen, and Vashti was her name-O

V-A-S-H Tee spells “Vashti”

2X

*Vashti* was her name-O.

There was a king, an angry Persian king, Achashverosh was his name-O

A-“chh”-A-S-H plus “verosh”

2X

Achashverosh was his name-O.

This Persian king, this angry little king, he didn’t like Queen Vashti-O

“Leave my sight” he said to Vashti

2X

“I’ll get me a pretty replacement-O.”

So they rounded up women, and held a contest, to find a replacement queen-O

E-S-T-H-E-R won it

2X

And became the land’s new queen—O.

Now there was an evil man, in the court of the king, and Haman was his name-O

H-A-M-A-N spells “Haman”

2X

He plotted to kill the Jews-O

Esther had an uncle, a little Jewish uncle, and Mordechai was his name-O

M-O-R-T-Y spells “Morty”

2X

And Morty learned of the plot-O.

So Morty told Esther, Jewish Queen Esther, of the plot to kill the Jews-O

So Esther prayed [we assume], and Esther fasted

Esther prayed, and Esther fasted

Esther prayed, and Esther fasted

And cooked up a plot of her own-O.

So she held some banquets, like Shirley’s Tea Parties, to butter up the King-O

P-A-R-T-Y spells “party”

2X

To butter up the King-O.

One of the nights after partying hard, the King could not fall asleep-O  
So he read from a book of a plot to kill him  
He read from a book of a plot to kill him  
He read from a book of a plot to kill him  
And how he was saved by Morty-O.

The king brought Haman and asked what to do for a man he wanted to honor-O  
Thinking the king meant to honor Haman  
Surely the king meant to honor Haman  
Haman told the king how to honor the man  
And was told to honor Morty-O.

Haman made a gallows, to hang Uncle Morty, as he planned to kill all the Jews-O  
But Esther revealed that she was a Jewess  
Esther revealed that she was a Jewess  
Esther revealed that she was a Jewess  
And the plot to kill her fam-ly-O.

The king was enraged, and made things right, and hung Haman on his gallows-O  
G-A-L-L-ows spells “gallows”  
2X  
And hung Haman on his gallows-O.

So that’s how Pur-im first began, and how the Jews there were saved-O  
P-U-R-I-M spells “Purim”  
2X  
And that’s how the Jews were saved-O.

Purim is kind of a strange holiday because it has both a light celebratory side to it, and also a side that is deadly serious. I do not use the word “deadly” by accident because before Achashverosh saw the light, he was a willing participant in Haman’s plan to massacre all the Jews in his kingdom. And, were it not for God’s intervention, he would have.

I cannot help but connect this ancient story with the one we are living through today in Iran’s threat to annihilate Israel. Look at these similarities:

- King Achashverosh and his henchman Haman were Persians. And what is the land of modern Iran? Persia.
- Modern Persia, now called Iran, is no longer a kingdom, but rather a *Muslim* theocracy ruled by its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Alli Khamenei. The Head Minister of Iran is no longer Haman—it is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.
- In the story of Esther, King Achashverosh is the Supreme Ruler, and Haman is given the king’s delegated authority and power to act as the Kingdom’s executive and spokesperson. In modern Iran, Ayatollah Alli Khamenei is the Supreme Leader, and Ahmadinejad has been delegated his authority and power similar to Haman.

- In the story of Esther, King Achashverosh appears as a powerful behind-the-scenes ruler who allows Haman to have his way in the Kingdom. In modern Iran, Ayatollah Alli Khamenei is a powerful behind-the-scenes ruler whom we know little about, and who appears to allow Ahmadinejad to have his way in Iran as Haman was given his way in ancient Persia.
- According to the Book of Esther, King Achashverosh had no basic dislike of the Jews, but was manipulated by Haman who hated the Jews for not bowing down to him. In modern Iran, we do not hear very much directly from Ayatollah Alli Khamenei, so we can only surmise his position on destroying Israel and the Jews. On the other hand, Ahmadinejad is very clear about it, and we see no indication that Khamenei intends to rein him in.
- In ancient Persia, the conflict was essentially between the God of Israel, and Haman and Achashverosh who established themselves almost as human gods to whom the populace had to bow down upon penalty of death. In modern Iran, Ahmadinejad wants to bring death and destruction upon Israel and the Jewish people because they will not bow down to the Iranians' *Muslim* god—*Allah*.

I can go further in these analogies, but I think I have made my point that the *Purim* story is being repeated today in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East before our very eyes. Customarily, at Purim, we focus on the two heroes of the story, Esther and Mordechai. Let us remember, however, what Esther asked Mordechai to do, that we read in [Esther 4:16](#):

*“Go, assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan, and have them fast for me, neither eating nor drinking for three days, night and day; also I and the girls attending me will fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.”*

Earlier, I said that there is no mention of God or praying to God in the Book of Esther, but the inference of God is clear since without relying on God, fasting would have been valueless. Notice that, not only did Esther and her attendants fast, but so did all the Israelites in *Shushan*. I do not intend to take anything away from Esther or Mordechai by saying this, but it was not their fasting and courageous actions alone that moved God to save Israel; they were the prayers and fasting of the Jewish People.

The need for the Jewish people and others who support them to fast for the protection of Israel (especially considering what is happening in the Middle East today) should be considered one of the main messages of the Book of Esther. That is why, on March 7 of this year, we will join with other Messianic Jewish congregations (both in America and in Israel) to fast and pray for Israel's protection from its neighbors who would destroy it—chief among them being Iran.

—CJB

## **Rosh Hashanah and Days of Awe**

### **Separation and Self-Examination**

*Delivered September 12, 2009*

Next Shabbat is *Rosh Hashanah*, the first in a sequence of Judaism's High Holy Days. It is a day, along with *Yom Kippur*, that defines Judaism as characteristically as Christmas and Easter define Christianity. It is a day that is so important in Jewish life and identity that Jews around the world, if they never set foot in a synagogue any other time of the year, are willing to pay to acquire a seat in a synagogue on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Since the day of *Rosh Hashanah* is so important, let us see what the *Torah* has to say about it:

Leviticus 23:23-25: *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of shofarot (rams' horns), a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.'*

That's it? That is all the Bible has to say about one of the most important days of the year? We're to blow *shofarot* and not go to work so we can conduct a sacrifice that we cannot do anyway because we have no Temple? Very strange unless we read a bit further in the Bible and are also willing to glean from other Jewish writings. First the Bible:

Leviticus 23:26-29: *"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Yom Kippur—the day of covering. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.'*

And also Leviticus 16:29-31:

*"This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever."*

So, the pieces now begin to fit together. We are to blow *shofarot* ten days before the *Yom Kippur* sacrifice in order to call attention to *Yom Kippur*'s critical nature—so critical, that the continued existence of Israel once depended on it. We know from elsewhere in Scripture that *shofarot* were often blown to sound an alarm or to call the people together for something very important, so that makes good sense. Let us go a little further now and read what the Jewish sages recorded in the Talmud about the period of time between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

The Soncino *Talmud* translation of Tractate Moed, Yoma 2a, MISHNAH 1 states:

“Seven days before the Day of Atonement the High Priest was removed from his house to the cell of the counsellors and another priest was prepared to take his place in case anything happened to him [the High Priest] that would unfit him [for the service]. R. Judah said: Also another wife was prepared for him in case his wife should die for it is written, and he shall make atonement for himself and for his house. His house means ‘his wife.’ They said to him: If so there would be no end to the matter.”

The *Gemara* of the *Talmud* reveals that the separation of the High Priest was in order to keep him ritually clean and insulated from temptation so that he could perform his Temple duties on *Yom Kippur*. And therein lies a lesson for us because, although we are not Levitical High Priests, the Bible teaches that New Covenant believers are priests under Yeshua (our High Priest), and our purity is needed as well in order for us to perform our priestly duties.

Possibly related to the High Priest’s separation seven days before *Yom Kippur*, Jewish tradition designates the ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* as “Days of Awe” (*Yamim Noraim*), also known as “Days of Repentance.” They are days of introspection—days to search out our personal sin from which to repent. It was used in ancient Israel as a time of cleansing so that by the time of *Yom Kippur*, the Israelites would have been in a right spiritual condition to receive the atonement provided by the Mosaic Covenant. The Israelites of old depended on the animal sacrifices for their atonement, but we who are New Covenant believers depend on Yeshua’s sacrifice for ours, and our need for repentance both as individuals and as New Covenant priests under Yeshua) is just as real.

Traditionally, there are understood to be three actions on men’s parts that can change God’s judgment of them; they are *teshuvah* (repentance), *tefilah* (prayer), and *zedaka* (charity). Now in the New Covenant, our eternal judgment is based on Yeshua’s sacrifice—not on our works. Nevertheless, we are subject to God’s judgment of us—call it his opinion of us regarding all of the ways we conduct ourselves in our relationship with him and with each other, and these three traditional actions are foundational. Let us take *teshuvah*—repentance. Who among us volunteers to explain to God why, because Yeshua died for us, we need not repent of our sins? *Tefilah*—prayer—is conversing with God. Who among us believes God is happy with those of his children who do not want to dialogue with him? Would you be if your children never came to visit? And *zedaka*—charity. God has made it abundantly clear that loving him is inseparably connected to loving our brother. *Tzedaka* is a sacrificial way to love our brother, and another way to love our brother is to seek reconciliation with those whom we may have wronged. This is also a tradition connected to the Days of Awe, and one that was broadened by Yeshua to every day throughout the year (see [Matthew 18:15-17](#)).

One more thing. The Shabbat that falls during the Days of Awe is called *Shabbat Shuvah* or “Shabbat of Return”—a further emphasis on our need to repent and return to God. I find that believers in Yeshua sometimes play down the Jewish emphasis on repentance—I think it is because they fear that we may not appreciate Yeshua’s gift to us of salvation through grace that they say is freely given, and that we do not earn. Well, there is a requirement in order for us to have Yeshua’s salvation; it is to repent and receive him as our Lord and savior. That requires faith on our part—faith that often does not come easily. If you doubt it, look around at the number of unbelievers there are as compared to believers.

So, despite the little said about it in Scripture, *Rosh Hashanah* is vitally important as being—not as just a day—but the beginning of a ten-day period during which Jews worldwide examine themselves and we, who are believers in Yeshua, contemplate our personal and priestly responsibilities, and methodically and consciously search out sin in our lives with an attitude that, if we find any, we will repent both for our own sakes, and also for the sakes of those whom we serve as priests.

Let us speak a little now about how Jews traditionally observe *Rosh Hashanah*. First of all, “*Rosh Hashanah*” literally means “head of the year” or “new year,” and it is often referred to as the Jewish New Year. That is a rabbinical concept that has some merit because when we repent we are renewed, and things become as new. The *Torah* calls the day *Yom T’ruah*, “day of blowing,” but *Rosh Hashanah* is fine also.

The *Torah* identifies *Rosh Hashanah* as a single day—the first day of the seventh month that we call *Tishri*; however, as with most Jewish Holy Days, many in the diaspora Jewish community observe a second day as well. This is due to the ambiguity of whether the day should be kept according to the time in Israel or local time. In Israel, *Rosh Hashanah* is a single day.

Perhaps the most characteristic thing about *Rosh Hashanah* is the tradition of hearing multiple notes blown on the *shofar*. Historically, *shofarot* are rams’ horns, but the large *shofarot* that we often see and use are antelope horns. It is a tradition in Judaism to not blow the *shofar* on *Shabbat*—any *Shabbat*. That creates a paradox for years when *Rosh Hashanah*, the day of blowing *shofarot*, falls on *Shabbat*. Not to blow *shofarot* on a day we are specifically commanded to blow them seems wrong, so most Messianic Jewish congregations blow *shofarot* on *Rosh Hashanah* whether or not it falls on *Shabbat*.

Except for the blowing of *shofarot*, the synagogue service on *Rosh Hashanah* is similar to most *Shabbat* services, with a few exceptions. One of the exceptions is that there are special *Torah* and *Haftarah* readings. The theme of the first and second-day’s *Torah* readings are in *B’reshit*, and center around events in the life of Isaac. The first day’s reading from [Genesis 21](#) recounts the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah because, according to legend, Sarah gave birth to Isaac on the day that eventually became *Rosh Hashanah*. The second day’s *Torah* reading is from [Genesis 22](#), the part we call the *Akedah* ([Genesis 22:1-19](#)). It tells of when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac at God’s direction, but was stopped by an angel and allowed to substitute a ram that was caught in a thicket by his horns—an obvious connection to the rams’ horns we blow ceremonially.

Now for the sake of our being further knowledgeable about Jewish practices, I want to mention the High Holyday prayer book and the tradition of wearing white. The High Holy Day prayer book is called a *machzor*. It is similar to the daily *siddur* and *Shabbat siddur*, but it contains unique prayers for *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot*. Sometimes *machzorim* are for all the holidays in one bound volume, and sometimes they are separate volumes specialized for each Holy Day. As for wearing white, it is optional but is a tradition on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. The *Torah Scrolls* are dressed in white as well, as are the curtain of the ark and the cover of the *bima*. The reason is that the color white symbolizes spiritual cleanliness, which is the theme of the season. There is also a special white garment that men sometimes wear during this season that is called a *kittle*. It may be worn at other times as well—by a groom during the marriage ceremony, by a man being laid to rest

(buried) along with his *tallit*, and by the leader (and sometimes the male participants) of a Passover *seder*.

Some traditions involve food. On *Rosh Hashanah*, it is traditional to eat apples dipped in honey, and other things that are sweet. Following the *oneg* next week (as we do each year), we will gather at the creek at Accotink Park for a ceremony known as *Tashlich*—which means “casting off.” It involves throwing bread into the flowing water and reading Micah 7:18-20:

*“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.”*

I have noticed in past years that some of us do not bring bread and throw stones instead. I guess that is okay, but I prefer to see the bread float away, suggestive of Yeshua taking away my sins. Once again, this is something that is not traditionally done if *Rosh Hashanah* falls on *Shabbat*, but I support our doing it even then.

In closing, permit me to read a few Scriptures that teach the importance of biblical introspection which is, of course, the purpose of the Days of Awe.

First, Matthew 7:3-5 that exhorts us to look to our own sins before we think we are fit to correct someone else’s:

*“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*

Next let us look at 1 Corinthians 11:27-31 that warns us about the danger of taking the *Shulchan Adonai*—the Table of the Lord—in an unworthy manner:

*“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.”*

Finally, let us look at 2 Corinthians 13:5:

*“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Yeshua the Messiah is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.”*



Well, I do not believe that anyone in this room is disqualified by unbelief, but even if someone here is, the remedy is in that person's own hands because Yeshua says to us:

Revelation 3:20-21: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”*

This is a good place to stop.

—NKJ

## Rosh HaShanah and Yom T'ruah

*Delivered September 25, 2014*

Anyone in Judaism will tell you that the biblical story of the binding of Isaac by his father Abraham is a *Rosh HaShanah* theme. They are speaking of [Genesis 22:1-19](#), of course, but I always wondered why it was a theme. *Rosh HaShanah* means “Head of the Year” or more commonly “New Year” and, if you try to find it in Scripture you will not. In fact, [Exodus 12:1-2](#) places the New Year on the first day of *Nisan* which is in the Spring—not now in the Fall. According to Scripture, we are not here today because it is the New Year, but because we read in [Leviticus 23:23-25](#):

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. ‘You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.’”*

So, according to Scripture, we are here to celebrate a memorial of blowing trumpets—*shofarot*. Actually, the Hebrew Scripture does not say “*shofarot*”—it just says “blowing,” and that is why this day is biblically called “Day of Blowing” or “*Yom T'ruah*.” I began by talking about the “binding of Isaac” and I will come back to it, but let me continue to reflect on the Leviticus commandment of *Yom T'ruah*. The ancients of Israel noticed that trumpets were sounded ten days before the atoning sacrifice for Israel on *Yom Kippur* and they concluded, probably correctly, that the days in between should serve as a time of spiritual preparation—a time of searching for and repenting of sin because the *Yom Kippur* sacrifice was of no value if it was not accompanied by repentance.

The leaders of Israel were not exempt from needing to repent and, in fact, tradition has it that the High Priest was isolated during this time so that he might search his soul, repent of his sin, and be able to enter the Holy of Holies, intercede for Israel, and hopefully come back out alive. Our information about this time of isolation comes from *Mishnah Yoma 1:1* of the *Talmud*, where we read:

*“Seven days before the Day of Atonement the High Priest was removed from his house to the cell of the counsellors and another priest was prepared to take his place in case anything happened to him [the High Priest] that would unfit him [for the service]. R. Judah said: Also another wife was prepared for him in case his wife should die for it is written, and he shall make atonement for himself and for his house. His house means ‘his wife.’ They said to him: If so there would be no end to the matter.”*

Also, the *Gemara* in *Yoma 2a* states that the separation of the High Priest was in order to keep him ritually clean and insulated from temptation, so that he could perform his Temple duties on *Yom Kippur*. And therein lies a lesson for us because, although we are not Levitical High Priests, [1 Peter 2:5-10](#) combined with [Hebrews 4:14](#) teach that we who are New Covenant believers have been elevated to priesthood under our new High Priest who is Yeshua, and that we are responsible for offering up spiritual sacrifices and are in need of spiritual cleansing as well.

I will have more to say about this later, but getting back to the Levitical High Priest: Likely related to his seven-day separation before *Yom Kippur*, Jewish tradition designates the ten days between

*Rosh Hashannah* and *Yom Kippur* as “Days of Awe” (*Yamim Noraim*), also known as “Days of Repentance.” They are days of introspection—days to look for sin of which to repent so that (it is said) by the time of *Yom Kippur*, individuals of Israel would be in a spiritual condition to receive the atonement of the Mosaic Covenant and be written in the Book of Life for the coming year.

But unlike the High Priest of old we, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (in the New Covenant) have no Temple in which to sacrifice, so how should we respond to *Yom T'ruah*? One possibility is, of course, to disregard it, thinking it to be inapplicable. The problem is though, that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us:

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

Well, if we cannot fulfill the Scripture as commanded and cannot disregard it either, what are we to do? The Jews who lived immediately after the Temple’s destruction in 70 AD had to answer that same question. Those who believed in Yeshua had an answer to it because they were not without a sacrifice for sin; their sacrifice was Yeshua as it is for us. However, those who did not believe in Yeshua, the forerunners of Rabbinical Judaism, had no such answer so they began to teach that God really did not want animals to be sacrificed; what God really wanted were substitutes such as keeping the traditional 613 commandments, giving *tz’dakah* (charity), and performing good deeds. Even so, both groups of Jews (those who believed in Yeshua and those who did not) continued to use the period from *Yom T'ruah* to *Yom Kippur* as a time of reflection and personal repentance. And so it is with us.

It is fascinating that, over the centuries, *Yom T'ruah*’s theme of blowing trumpets has had so many other themes added to it, and that *Rosh Hashanah* was adopted as the day’s name by the Rabbinical Jewish community. Some of the added themes are “the anniversary of the creation of the world, and “the day that books of our spiritual account are opened in heaven for God to judge.” These do not come from the Bible, so we notice them but do not proclaim them as necessarily true.

There are also many cultural traditions that have been attached to *Rosh HaShanah* such as:

1. We wish each other “*l’shanah tovah*” (“To a good year!”) or “May you be written in the Book of Life for a good year!”
2. We celebrate with sweet foods like apples dipped in honey, honey cakes, and other sweet foods symbolic of our desire for a sweet year. Other traditional foods are pomegranates and carrots and even fish heads symbolic of our wanting to be like the head and not like the tail. Do not ask me to explain that!
3. We reshape our *challah* bread during this season from the traditionally braided *challah* to the round spiral *challah* with added honey and raisins.
4. We celebrate *Tashlich*—tossing bread or stones into a large body of water to symbolize the casting away of our sins.

5. We blow the *shofar* to alert us of our need to repent of our sins.
6. We wear white clothing and dress our *Torah* scrolls in white symbolic of this being a season where we seek God's holiness in our personal lives and for Israel (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16).
7. We read about the binding of Isaac (*The Akedah*) in *Bereshit*, the Book of Genesis.

The story of the binding of Isaac holds great mysteries for us and also great lessons because God asked Abraham to do what is no doubt the most difficult thing anyone can do—sacrifice his own child's life. The *Akedah* (Genesis 22:1-19), read during the *Torah* service leaves us with some perplexing questions. First, why did God order Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac when we know from other Scriptures that such killing of another human being is contrary to his law? Also, why did Isaac not resist being bound and sacrificed? After all, he was a strong fully-grown young man and Abraham was elderly. And why does Scripture say that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice but that the Angel of the Lord told him to stop?

The annals of Jewish legend and tradition discuss these questions and give many answers, most of which are more problematic than the questions. Had the Rabbis been considering the New Covenant Scriptures in their thought processes; however, they would have understood toward what the *Akedah* was prophetically pointing. There is, however, a Rabbinic *midrash* I came across that, while it departs from biblical truth as many *midrashim* do, is nevertheless insightful about one biblical truth, so let me share with you what Rabbi Judah said that is recorded in Pirkei de-Rav Eliezer 31; remember, this is not biblical:

*“R. Judah says: When the sword touched Isaac's throat his soul flew clean out of him. And when He (meaning the Angel of the Lord) let his voice be heard from between the two cherubim, ‘Lay not thy hand upon the lad, ‘the lad's soul returned to his body. Then his father unbound him, and Isaac rose, knowing that in this way the dead would come back to life in the future; whereupon he began to recite, Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who quickens the dead.”*

Clearly Isaac's soul flying out of him has no biblical basis, and the *midrash* is also at variance with the Bible since Isaac did not die and come back to life. However, what it does show us is that some early rabbis were grappling with the concept of resurrection from the dead and the related issue of eternal life.

We who are believers in Messiah Yeshua and knowledgeable of the New Testament do not need such *midrashim* to explain what happened here. All we need do is read Hebrews 11:17-19:

*“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”*

So we see that that Rabbi Judah was on the right track in his understanding that the Scriptures of the *Akedah* validate God's ability to raise Isaac from the dead, and also that Abraham had faith for it and relied on it:

James 2:21-23 says:

*“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”*

But let me tell you about someone else who rose from the dead—the one that the *Akedah* Scriptures point to—Yeshua our Messiah. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, Paul says of him:

*“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Yeshua. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*

And in Romans 8:11 Paul says:

*“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Yeshua from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Messiah from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

So, our Father in Heaven who raised his son Yeshua will raise us also to eternal life if we will just exercise the same faith as Abraham and believe God. As John 3:16 teaches us:

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

Do you see the parallel between Yeshua and Isaac?

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...”*

*“For Abraham so loved the Lord that he was willing to give his only begotten son...”*  
[my words]

Both Yeshua and Isaac had fathers who were prepared to sacrifice them unto death because both fathers knew that their sons would be resurrected. Because the Angel of the Lord stopped Abraham's hand and supplied a substitute sacrifice, Isaac did not die. But Yeshua did die, and was resurrected

to life for our sakes. He is our ram in the thicket—our substitute sacrifice for our sins for which we deserve to die, but for which we need not die if we repent and accept Yeshua as our sacrifice.

What I have just told you is true, so any of you here in this room who want to know more about how to assure your eternal life with God, please find me or one of the elders after this service and let us explain it to you and pray with you.

In concluding, let me turn to another aspect of this Holy Day and speak to those of us who have already received Yeshua as our Messiah. I said earlier in this message that, in the New Covenant, Yeshua has been made High Priest and that we who are his disciples have been made priests under him, to offer up spiritual sacrifices; 1 Peter 2:5-10 explains it this way:

*“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Messiah Yeshua. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”*

Our priesthood has relevance to this day of *Yom T'ruah* (or *Rosh Hashanah*) because the *shofar* that will be blown shortly, will signal the beginning of a ten day period for us to make ourselves spiritually ready so that, on *Yom Kippur*, we can accompany Yeshua into the Most Holy Place and perform our duty as priests to intercede for the preservation, protection and salvation of Israel. The Jewish People are the focus of *Yom Kippur* because when the Temple still stood, the Levitical High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place once every year, to conduct special sacrifices for himself, his family, and for all of Israel. In the final sacrifice, the High Priest laid his hands on a goat that was chosen by lots, and sent it away into the wilderness to carry the sins of Israel out of the camp.

Are you surprised to hear that you can enter the Holiest of places with Yeshua? Then consider Hebrews 10:19-22, which says:

*“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Yeshua, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”*

Perhaps you have never looked at yourself as being a priest or considered what responsibilities that entails. If not, this is an appropriate time to do it.

Father, I pray that each person in this room will take away exactly what he or she needs in order to spiritually move forward in you and with you. For those among us who do not yet know Yeshua as

Lord, I pray that you reveal Yeshua through whatever means you deem best.

For those of us who already know Yeshua, I pray that you impress each and every one of us with our priestly responsibility to examine ourselves in these next ten Days of Awe, and to repent under Yeshua's cleansing blood of any personal sins we may discover so that we can be fit to intercede for the People and Nation of Israel on Yom Kippur.

—NKJ

## Sh'mini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

*Delivered October 8, 2012*

I want to give you a short overview of today's service in which we are celebrating two things. We are assembling on *Sh'mini Atzeret* in compliance with Scripture, and we are also celebrating *Simchat Torah*, the day we finish reading and we re-roll the *Torah* Scroll.

*Sh'mini Atzeret* means the 8<sup>th</sup> Day of Holding Back and, because it follows the seven days of *Sukkot*, some call it the 8<sup>th</sup> Day of Assembly or the 8<sup>th</sup> Day of Completion; strictly speaking, it is not the last day of *Sukkot*—it is an added day given to us by God as though to say: “I care for My people so much that I will give them an additional day of celebration.”

*Sh'mini Atzeret* appears in Scripture twice in connection with *Sukkot*, where the *Torah* recites the festivals; they are Leviticus 23:33-36, and Numbers 29:12, 35-40; I will read from Leviticus 23:

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. ‘On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. ‘For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.’”*

*Sh'mini Atzeret* is the last commanded feast of the biblical year and, because of the inclusion of a sin offering by fire, it is sometimes thought of as the final day of the season of repentance (and the day of God's execution of judgment) that begins with *Yom T'ruah* (*Rosh Hashanah*). As in the case of *Sukkot*, *Sh'mini Atzeret* is associated with the Fall harvest, but also with the Israelites' need for water in the form of winter rain.

*Sh'mini Atzeret* is also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 7:8-10, in which the Temple's altar was dedicated for seven days of the Feast, and a sacred assembly was observed on the eighth day.

Now let us briefly turn our attention to *Simchat Torah*, which, in the diaspora is commonly celebrated the day following *Sh'mini Atzeret*, but in Israel, is combined with *Sh'mini Atzeret* as we are doing tonight. *Simchat Torah* is not a biblically mandated celebration; in fact, it does not surface in Jewish literature until about the year 1000. It literally means “the celebration of the *Torah*,” and it marks the end of one cycle of *Torah* reading, and the beginning of the next. In recognition of this, we dance around the synagogue seven times with both of our *Torah* scrolls, passing the scrolls one to another, after which we read the concluding verses of Deuteronomy from one of them, and the first part of Genesis from the other. In showing this much attention to the *Torah*, let us be mindful that the *Torah* is but five of the sixty-six books in the Bible. So when we see the *Torah* Scrolls carried around the room, let our hearts rejoice for the entire Bible that God has given us.

There is another aspect to this that I would like you to think about, and that is that our traditional cycle of reading the *Torah* drives our reading of the rest of the written Word of God. The *Torah* is truly the foundational document upon which the rest of God's written Word is built.



John 1:1-3 and 14 state:

*“In the beginning was [the Logos] the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being.” ... “The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his Sh'khinah, the Sh'khinah of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.”*

So, the Book of John identifies Yeshua as the *Logos* Word of God, who was there at the time of creation and was responsible for it. Did Yeshua disappear from human affairs between creation and the time of his incarnation through Miryam? Not likely, so when we celebrate *Simchat Torah*, the completion of our *Torah* reading cycle, the re-rolling of the scrolls, and our beginning to read again at Genesis 1:1, I am reminded of the never-ending nature of the Word of God and of Yeshua himself, the *Logos* made flesh. Yes, we in Messianic Judaism give a great amount of attention to the *Torah*, but not because it is greater in inspiration than the rest of the *Tanakh* and *Kitvey B'rit Chadashah*, but rather because it is a foundational building block and mystically connected to Yeshua in a way that even we only partially understand, and that most believers in the world do not even think about.

Now getting back to *Sh'mini Atzeret*, there was an important Scripture that we discussed at our *Sukkot Shabbat* service and, although it does not specifically refer to *Sh'mini Atzeret*, we are going to recognize it during our *Simchat Torah* processional this evening by the children (and some of us older children as well), carrying flags of the nations, banners, and other objects of celebration as we circle the synagogue. The Scripture I am speaking of is Zechariah 14:16-17:

*“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.”*

This Scripture is of great significance in prophesying that all the nations of the earth will one day come to recognize their connectedness to Israel and their need to give thanks to God each year in Jerusalem. So, with this short explanation, let us proceed with rejoicing before the Lord in our combined observance of *Sh'mini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah*.

—CJB

## Shavuot, Torah, and the Holy Spirit

*Delivered June 11, 2016*

If you ask a typical Christian believer if he or she observes the appointed time of *Shavu'ot*, you will probably get a blank stare and be asked: “What’s that?” When you remember that “*Shavu'ot*” is a Hebrew word, you will most likely change your question with the explanation: “I mean the Feast of Weeks that is commanded in [Leviticus 23](#); you know, the firstfruits harvest that comes seven weeks after Passover.” Still no recognition, so you try once more: “I mean Pentecost!” Eyes light up. “Oh! You mean the time after Jesus ascended to his Father and sent back the Holy Spirit!”

This hypothetical conversation illuminates a major difference in Christian and Messianic Jewish awareness. In the life of a typical Christian, most things in the Bible that are of practical importance begin with Jesus, whereas for the Messianic believer, practical importance begins at Genesis and builds through all the covenants.

If the Christian believer to whom we are speaking knows what the Feast of Weeks is, you can ask another question: “What do you think is important about the Feast of Weeks?” He or she will most likely say: “The Holy Spirit came to earth in power on that day.” I would hope that the Messianic believer will add: “That is true, but most important is that God commanded the day for all Israelites to keep throughout our generations!” In thus saying, the Messianic believer will, of course, be referring to [Leviticus 23:15-21](#), which reads:

*“From the day after the day of rest—that is, from the day you bring the sheaf for waving—you are to count seven full weeks, until the day after the seventh week; you are to count fifty days; and then you are to present a new grain offering to ADONAI. You must bring bread from your homes for waving—two loaves made with one gallon of fine flour, baked with leaven—as firstfruits for ADONAI. Along with the bread, present seven lambs without defect one year old, one young bull and two rams; these will be a burnt offering for ADONAI, with their grain and drink offerings, an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for ADONAI. Offer one male goat as a sin offering and two male lambs one year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. The cohen will wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before ADONAI, with the two lambs; these will be holy for ADONAI for the cohen. On the same day, you are to call a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations, no matter where you live.”*

The difference between the Christian and Messianic Jewish response to both questions is revealing. While both the Christian and the Messianic believer share a common belief in Yeshua, Messianic Judaism (as a Jewish faith expression) is *Torah*-conscious and seeks to be *Torah*-observant, whereas Christianity (as a Christian faith expression) is typically neither. I supposed it is to be expected, since the Jewish people have a very special responsibility to the *Torah* and, even in the New Covenant, an obligation for its preservation. This is expressed by Paul in [Romans 3:1-2](#):

*“Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.”*

Now it is easier to talk about *Torah*-observance than to do it. Leviticus 23 instructs us to wave two loaves of bread; that much is easy. But it also says that we must sacrifice seven lambs and a bull; two rams; a goat; and we must also have a *cohen* (a Levitical priest) to assist us. Well, that works if one has a Tabernacle (or Temple) with a functioning Levitical priesthood. We do not so, in what way then can we even begin to say that we are *Torah*-observant, and how can God expect it of us? The obvious answer is that we are not *Torah*-observant in the way that Moses and his followers in ancient Israel were, and God does not expect it of us because we are under a different covenant and live under new and different conditions.

The result is inescapable that Jews today are not under all the obligations of the Mosaic Covenant. The *Torah* as originally given is still alive to us, but we have to approach it differently than we would were we still with Moses at Mt. Sinai. If we were still at Mt. Sinai, we would be able to keep all the commandments of the *Torah* literally and in every particular. But we are not, we cannot, and we should not attempt to, because God gave us “a new and better covenant” that is referred to in Hebrews 8:6, and that includes the Holy Spirit; for as Jeremiah prophesied in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34):

*“Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI. “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.”*

Under today’s New Covenant, we cannot obey every commandment of the *Torah* literally, so we obey those that we can and should, and provide appropriate substitutions for those that we cannot or should not. Over the many centuries since the Second Temple was destroyed, Judaism developed many such substitutions so, in addition to our being led by the Holy Spirit individually, it is profitable that we learn about and consider the wider Jewish community’s way of *Torah*-observance. In the case of *Shav’uot*, the Jewish practice is to observe it as a Sabbath, which means that, at minimum, we do no ordinary work on it and, as a substitute for the requisite sacrifices, we attend synagogue services for prayer. Beyond that, it is also customary to wave two loaves of bread, read the *Megillah* of Ruth, eat dairy meals with leavened bread, and read and study the *Torah*. This latter practice is motivated by the belief of some, that the *Torah* was given on *Shav’uot*, and there is a *midrashic* legend that a goodly number of the Israelites fell asleep the night before the *Torah* was given and that God had to awaken them; ergo, some in the Jewish community do the opposite—they stay awake all night reading the *Torah*. There are also several legends that purport to explain the eating of dairy. One of them is that, after receiving the commandments of *kashrut*, the Israelites still did not know the *kosher* way to slaughter animals, so they ate only dairy until they had it figured out. These legends are not found in Scripture; that is why they are legends.

Now, looking back at Leviticus 23 (and still speaking about *Shavu’ot*), we see that the waving of two loaves of bread is offered as *bikkurim* (or firstfruits) of the new grain harvest for the Lord. This is at the conclusion of seven weeks and fifty days from when there was another firstfruits offering, on

a day we also call *Yom HaBikurim*, the day on which we commemorate Yeshua's resurrection. Yes, *Shavuot* is also a "*Yom Bikurim*" and, although the *Torah* commandment concerning it is exclusively connected to Israel's agricultural harvest, we read in the New Covenant Scriptures that God chose this very day to send mankind the Holy Spirit. Coincidence? Not likely, so let us look at [Acts 2:1-41](#); please listen carefully as I begin reading at [verse 1](#):

*"The festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak. Now there were staying in Yerushalayim religious Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered; they were confused, because each one heard the believers speaking in his own language. Totally amazed, they asked, "How is this possible? Aren't all these people who are speaking from the Galil? How is it that we hear them speaking in our native languages? We are Parthians, Medes, Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Y'hudah, ... [and so on ...] How is it that we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things God has done?" Amazed and confused, they all went on asking each other, "What can this mean?" But others made fun of them and said, "They've just had too much wine!" Then Kefa stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice to address them:"*

*"You Judeans, and all of you staying here in Yerushalayim! Let me tell you what this means! Listen carefully to me! "These people aren't drunk, as you suppose—it's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken about through the prophet Yo'el: 'ADONAI says: "In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out from my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy. I will perform miracles in the sky above and signs on the earth below—blood, fire and thick smoke. The sun will become dark and the moon blood before the great and fearful Day of ADONAI comes. And then, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved."*

We see how Peter is working the salvation message into his explanation of Jeremiah's prophecy, so let us continue reading as Peter explains about Yeshua's resurrection:

*"Men of Isra'el! Listen to this! Yeshua from Natzeret was a man demonstrated to you to have been from God by the powerful works, miracles and signs that God performed through him in your presence. You yourselves know this. This man was arrested in accordance with God's predetermined plan and foreknowledge; and, through the agency of persons not bound by the Torah, you nailed him up on a stake and killed him! "But God has raised him up and freed him from the suffering of death; it was impossible that death could keep its hold on him. For David says this about him: 'I saw ADONAI always before me, for he is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken. For this reason, my heart was glad; and my tongue rejoiced; and now my body too will live on in the certain hope that you will not abandon me to Sh'ol or let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will fill me with joy by your presence.' "Brothers, I know I can say to you frankly that the patriarch David died and was*

*buried—his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that one of his descendants would sit on his throne, he was speaking in advance about the resurrection of the Messiah, that it was he who was not abandoned in Sh’ol and whose flesh did not see decay. God raised up this Yeshua! And we are all witnesses of it! “Moreover, he has been exalted to the right hand of God; has received from the Father what he promised, namely, the Ruach HaKodesh; and has poured out this gift, which you are both seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into heaven. But he says, ‘ADONAI said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’*

So far, Peter has explained to the gathered crowd what they have just experienced—that Yeshua was resurrected, went to be with his Father in heaven, and sent back the Holy Spirit (a “firstfruit”). What we read next though, is what we most need to take away from this reading of Acts, Chapter 2. It is the example of Peter reaching out to his fellow Jews and telling them that salvation and the Holy Spirit are acquired through faith in Yeshua. Let us listen to Peter and learn as we continue with verse 36:

*“Therefore, let the whole house of Isra’el know beyond doubt that God has made him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua, whom you executed on a stake!” On hearing this, they were stung in their hearts; and they said to Kefa and the other emissaries, “Brothers, what should we do?” Kefa answered them, “Turn from sin, return to God, and each of you be immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah into forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh! For the promise is for you, for your children, and for those far away—as many as ADONAI our God may call!” He pressed his case with many other arguments and kept pleading with them, “Save yourselves from this perverse generation!” “*

Notice that Peter did not pull out a “Jews for Jesus” tract or lead the crowd in reading the “Four Spiritual Laws” (both useful tools in their place). He did, however, quote from the *Tanakh*, and spoke prophetic words that were eventually incorporated into the New Testament. The Holy Spirit then gave power to the Scriptures that were spoken, and the people were moved to repent and receive Yeshua. And even with that amount and display of power, not everyone who heard accepted Yeshua, for we read in verse 41:

*So those who accepted what he said were immersed, and there were added to the group that day about three thousand people.*

The inference, of course, is that some did not accept but, for those that did, life changed dramatically, and the New Covenant body of believers was born that very day. You may not have thought of it, but it was on that day of *Shavu’ot* that Peter taught us the principle way to evangelize, which is to present the Scriptures to those who need to know them, share our testimony, and rely on the Holy Spirit to do the rest.

Nevertheless, *Shavu’ot* is probably the easiest of the commanded feasts to overlook because, after all, what about it is so memorable? Passover has its *seder* and *matzah*. *Rosh HaShanah* has its trumpets. *Yom Kippur* has its fast and break-fast. And *Sukkot* has its *lulov*, *etrog*, and booths. But *Shavuot*? What does it have to endear us to it? To explain *Shavuot*, we have to begin with Passover, and in Leviticus 23:4-6 we read:

*“These are the designated times of ADONAI, the holy convocations you are to proclaim at their designated times. ‘In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between sundown and complete darkness, comes Pesach for ADONAI. On the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of matzah; for seven days you are to eat matzah.’”*

Continuing with verses 10-12:

*“Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘After you enter the land I am giving you and harvest its ripe crops, you are to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the cohen. He is to wave the sheaf before ADONAI, so that you will be accepted; the cohen is to wave it on the day after the Shabbat. On the day that you wave the sheaf, you are to offer a male lamb without defect, in its first year, as a burnt offering for ADONAI.’”*

So, to the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, we have now added a prophecy of coming into the promised land and a harvest in the land, during which the firstfruits of that harvest belong to God. The Israelites were to commemorate that harvest by offering both their agricultural firstfruits and also a perfect male lamb. Remember that perfect lamb because it is important as we will soon see.

We are also told that this remembrance was not to be just on that one occasion, but year after year, for in verse 14b we are commanded:

*“...this is a permanent regulation through all your generations, no matter where you live.”*

And now we start counting days toward the next feast; Leviticus 23: 15-17:

*“From the day after the day of rest—that is, from the day you bring the sheaf for waving—you are to count seven full weeks, until the day after the seventh week; you are to count fifty days; and then you are to present a new grain offering to ADONAI. You must bring bread from your homes for waving—two loaves made with one gallon of fine flour, baked with leaven—as firstfruits for ADONAI.”*

Here we have another firstfruits offering 50 days (and seven weeks) after the initial firstfruits offering. This is the day we call *Shavuot* which means “weeks,” and which is also called a day of firstfruits in Numbers 28:26:

*“On the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to ADONAI in your feast of Shavu’ot, you are to have a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work;”*

So, we have a second day commemorating firstfruits and Scripture says that on this day, in addition to the agricultural offering and other offerings, the Israelites were once again to sacrifice an unblemished lamb—this time not one lamb but seven:

Leviticus 23:18: *“Along with the bread, present seven lambs without defect one year old, one young bull and two rams; these will be a burnt offering for ADONAI, with their grain and drink offerings, an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for ADONAI.”*

And as with the first day of firstfruits, this second day of firstfruits must also be celebrated every year, for in verse 21 we read:

*“On the same day, you are to call a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations, no matter where you live.”*

There is one other important piece of information that sometimes escapes us because it is not in Scripture, but is rather in the orally transmitted tradition that has come down to us. It seems that shortly after the destruction of the second Temple, the Jewish leaders identified *Shavuot* as the anniversary of when the *Torah* was given to Israel at Mount Sinai. We can read about the giving of the Torah in Scripture in Exodus 19:1 to 20:17(20), and in Deuteronomy 5:1-19(22), 9:9-19, 10:1-5, and 10:10. The fact that there is nothing in the biblical text explicitly linking the giving of the *Torah* to *Shavuot* has resulted in my not paying much attention to the rabbinic position for years. But we know that not all the events of history are recorded in Scripture, so let us suppose, for a moment, that God conveyed this information about *Shavuot* it to the Jewish leaders of their day through revelation, and let us see where that takes us:

1. We have Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
2. We have a prophecy of coming into the promised land.
3. We have a day of firstfruits where an unblemished lamb is offered to the Lord.
4. We then count 50 days and 7 weeks to a second day of firstfruits called *Shavuot* where not one, but seven unblemished lambs are offered to the Lord.
5. And we have the additional fact that the Jewish leadership (perhaps prophetically) has come to regard *Shavuot*—this second day of firstfruits—as the anniversary of God having given Israel the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Now we take a long jump into the future, to the year and time of Yeshua’s death, and we see the genesis of the New Covenant and the parallels and fulfillment of the history we have just recounted. Yeshua celebrated his last Passover, and was put to death shortly thereafter. That year as always, Israelites sacrificed their perfect lambs but this year, Yeshua was one of those lambs. He was resurrected from the tomb on the first day of the week which was *Yom HaBikkurim*, the Day of Firstfruits; how appropriate, since he was indeed the firstfruit of the resurrection. He walked the earth in his resurrected body for forty days, and then left the earth to join his Father in Heaven. But he instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for whom he called the “comforter” and whom we now know was the *Ruach Ha Kodesh*—the Holy Spirit. His disciples did not understand what Yeshua meant, but they were going to Jerusalem anyway to perform their annual *Shavuot* or Spring harvest sacrifices that included the sacrifice of perfect lambs. Little did they know that that year, on that day, they would be visited by the *Ruach HaKodesh* who, as predicted, came in place of the perfect lamb of God who had left them ten days earlier. This particular day of *Shavuot* is what the Christian Church calls “Pentecost.”

And where does the giving of the *Torah* fit in to the New Covenant? That becomes clear in light of John 1:1-3 and verse 14 which show that Yeshua was the Word of God made flesh for a season:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being.” ... “The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his Sh’khiyah, the Sh’khiyah of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.”*

Let me try to put this all together now. The New Covenant Scriptures make it clear that the Shavuot season that seems to be merely agricultural under the Mosaic Covenant is really a prophetic foreshadowing of God visiting our world as the written *Torah* (if the rabbis were correct), then later as Messiah Yeshua, the *Torah* made flesh according to John 1, and finally as the *Ruach HaKodesh*—the *Torah* who can dwell within us. Jeremiah 31:32(33) says of the New Covenant:

*“‘For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,’ says ADONAI: ‘I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”*

So, *Shavuot* may not have a lot of “pizzazz” like some of the other feasts and, at first glance, may look like just a day that commemorates God’s agricultural provision for Israel, but it is clearly so much more.

—CJB



## **Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles**

*Delivered October 6, 2012*

I look at *Sukkot* as the biblical equivalent of America's "Thanksgiving," but it is not one day; it is seven. And not just for Israel, but for all nations, and for all of us individually as well. Now that broadens *Sukkot* from being merely a seven-day season of recounting God's provisions for the ancient Israelites, to its being a season of thanksgiving for everyone for all of God's provisions—those of the past, those of the present, and those of the future. We are accustomed to thanking God for his provisions of the past and perhaps we have awareness of our present blessings as well. But thanking him for providing for us in the future? How does that work? It works by faith. We believe [Philippians 4:19](#), in which Paul said:

*"Moreover, my God will fill every need of yours according to his glorious wealth, in union with the Messiah Yeshua."*

And we also believe Yeshua when He said to his *talmidim* in [Luke 12:22-31](#):

*"Because of this I tell you, don't worry about your life—what you will eat or drink; or about your body—what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Think about the ravens! They neither plant nor harvest, they have neither storerooms nor barns, yet God feeds them. You are worth much more than the birds! Can any of you by worrying add an hour to his life? If you can't do a little thing like that, why worry about the rest? Think about the wild irises, and how they grow. They neither work nor spin thread; yet, I tell you, not even Shlomo in all his glory was clothed as beautifully as one of these. If this is how God clothes grass, which is alive in the field today and thrown in the oven tomorrow, how much more will he clothe you! What little trust you have! In other words, don't strive after what you will eat and what you will drink—don't be anxious. For all the pagan nations in the world set their hearts on these things. Your Father knows that you need them too. Rather, seek his Kingdom; and these things will be given to you as well."*

This is so important that I want to read Yeshua's same statement as it is rendered in another Scripture, [Matthew 6:28-33](#):

*"And why be anxious about clothing? Think about the fields of wild irises, and how they grow. They neither work nor spin thread, yet I tell you that not even Shlomo in all his glory was clothed as beautifully as one of these. If this is how God clothes grass in the field—which is here today and gone tomorrow, thrown in an oven—won't he much more clothe you? What little trust you have! So don't be anxious, asking, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or 'How will we be clothed?' For it is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Notice that the [Matthew](#) Scripture promises God's provision but with the condition that we seek his righteousness as well, and that brings us to God's provision for the Israelites and *Sukkot* where the same condition of seeking his Kingdom and righteousness applies. But first, let us review a Scripture

that connects *Sukkot* with God's agricultural provision for ancient Israel; in Deuteronomy 16:13-15 we read:

*“You are to keep the festival of Sukkot for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing-floor and winepress. Rejoice at your festival—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, the L'vi'im, and the foreigners, orphans and widows living among you. Seven days you are to keep the festival for ADONAI your God in the place ADONAI your God will choose, because ADONAI your God will bless you in all your crops and in all your work, so you are to be full of joy!”*

Now returning to Matthew 6:33, we remember that God's provision for us is conditioned on our seeking “*first his Kingdom and his righteousness.*” That, of course, was said by Yeshua many years after Deuteronomy was written, but a similar principle was expressed within the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy 11:13-17:

*“So if you listen carefully to my mitzvot which I am giving you today, to love ADONAI your God and serve him with all your heart and all your being; then, [says ADONAI,] ‘I will give your land its rain at the right seasons, including the early fall rains and the late spring rains; so that you can gather in your wheat, new wine and olive oil; and I will give your fields grass for your livestock; with the result that you will eat and be satisfied.’ But be careful not to let yourselves be seduced, so that you turn aside, serving other gods and worshipping them. If you do, the anger of ADONAI will blaze up against you. He will shut up the sky, so that there will be no rain. The ground will not yield its produce, and you will quickly pass away from the good land ADONAI is giving you.”*

The above Scripture was spoken only to Israel. However, *Sukkot* is unique among the various “appointed times” in that keeping *Sukkot* is incumbent upon the Gentile nations as well. Zechariah 14:16-19 states that the following will occur after the conclusion of a great war in which Israel will prevail:

*“Finally, everyone remaining from all the nations that came to attack Yerushalayim will go up every year to worship the king, ADONAI-Tzva'ot, and to keep the festival of Sukkot. If any of the families of the earth does not go up to Yerushalayim to worship the king, ADONAI-Tzva'ot, no rain will fall on them. If the family of Egypt doesn't go up, if they refuse to come, they will have no [annual] overflow [from the Nile]; moreover, there will be the plague with which ADONAI will strike the nations that don't go up to keep the festival of Sukkot. This will be Egypt's punishment and the punishment of all the nations that don't go up to keep the festival of Sukkot.”*

Do you see the similarity between Deuteronomy 11:13-17 and Zechariah 14:16-19? The similarity is that if any nation (including Israel) does not worship God and keep *Sukkot* in Jerusalem each year, there will be no rain or agricultural blessing for that nation. But I thought that *Sukkot* was merely a seven-day holiday commemorating God's provision of food and shelter for ancient Israel. Why then is it such a serious infraction for Israel, the Gentile nations and, by implication for us individually to fail to keep *Sukkot*? It is because the essence of keeping *Sukkot* is being thankful to God for his provisions of the past, present, and future. If we do not observe *Sukkot*, it is an indication that we

do not have a grateful heart toward God, and that there is therefore a serious fault in our relationship with him.

Since every one of the other appointed times has a prophetic connection to Yeshua, it is reasonable for us to ask: “What is *Sukkot*’s connection to Yeshua? On first inspection it seems sparse because the only direct mention of Yeshua and *Sukkot* in the same passage of Scripture is [John 7:37-43](#), in which Yeshua reveals his Messianic identity; the Scripture reads:

*“Now on the last day of the festival, Hoshana Rabbah, Yeshua stood and cried out, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and drinking! Whoever puts his trust in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being!’ (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who trusted in him were to receive later—the Spirit had not yet been given, because Yeshua had not yet been glorified.) On hearing his words, some people in the crowd said, ‘Surely this man is ‘the prophet’”; others said, ‘This is the Messiah.’ But others said, ‘How can the Messiah come from the Galil? Doesn’t the Tanakh say that the Messiah is from the seed of David and comes from Beit-Lechem, the village where David lived?’ So the people were divided because of him.”*

The substance of what Yeshua revealed was certainly important, but what was the significance of his revealing it on *Sukkot*? One reason that Yeshua chose the day was so that he could speak of himself as being the source of “living water,” analogous to (but greater than) the ceremonial water that was poured out as part of the Feast. But that is not the whole of it. I believe the reason that Yeshua revealed himself on *Sukkot* was that he was identifying himself as the fulfillment of *Sukkot*’s main theme—God’s provision for Israel, the King referred to in [Zechariah 14:16-19](#), whom all the nations on earth would come to Jerusalem to worship. This is of course consistent with *Sukkot* being a season of thanksgiving for all of God’s provisions, but especially for his ultimate provision—his son, our Messiah.

So, here we are in the middle of the Feast of *Sukkot*, one of the most significant of the appointed times, the one that is for all believers (be they Jew or Gentile) and the one that the Gentile nations will be held accountable for keeping, yet the majority of Christians in the world knows nothing about it. It is a good thing for them that we are not yet at the time prophesied by Zechariah, but we who are Jews and *K’rovei Yisrael* are responsible for keeping the Feast now, and understanding that Yeshua is its fulfillment. We keep the Feast of *Sukkot* by reflecting on all the provisions of God for which we are thankful, and especially for God’s greatest provision, Messiah Yeshua. We also keep the Feast by complying as closely as we can to the instructions given in [Leviticus 23:33-43](#):

*“ADONAI said to Moshe, ‘Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of Sukkot for seven days to ADONAI. On the first day there is to be a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work. For seven days you are to bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI; on the eighth day you are to have a holy convocation and bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI; it is a day of public assembly; do not do any kind of ordinary work. These are the designated times of ADONAI that you are to proclaim as holy convocations and bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI—a burnt offering, a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, each on its own day—besides the Shabbats of ADONAI, your gifts, all*

*your vows and all your voluntary offerings that you give to ADONAI. But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered the produce of the land, you are to observe the festival of ADONAI seven days; the first day is to be a complete rest and the eighth day is to be a complete rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit, palm fronds, thick branches and river-willows, and celebrate in the presence of ADONAI your God for seven days. You are to observe it as a feast to ADONAI seven days in the year; it is a permanent regulation, generation after generation; keep it in the seventh month. You are to live in sukkot for seven days; every citizen of Isra'el is to live in a sukkah, so that generation after generation of you will know that I made the people of Isra'el live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am ADONAI your God.” (see also, Leviticus 23:14-16).*

Again, we read in Deuteronomy 16:13-17:

*“You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.”*

*Sukkot* is also prominent at the end of every seven years when all Israel is to assemble and hear the Law of Moses read publicly (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). 1 Kings 8:1-5 gives an account of that happening under Solomon. Another account involving Solomon is in 2 Chronicles 7:8-10, where the Temple's altar was dedicated for seven days of the Feast (*Sukkot*), a sacred assembly was observed on the eighth day (*Sh'mini Atzeret*), and the people partied until Solomon apparently had enough, and sent them home on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day.

The reference to rain in Scripture was well known in Temple times when the crowds chanted: “We will gather water from the wells of salvation!” and “*Hoshianu*” (“save us now”) from Isaiah 12:3 and Psalms 118: 22-24. The priest would circle the altar in the Temple one time pouring out water, and praying for the water of life (even the Spirit of God) to be poured out upon the people. He did this each of the first six days of the feast and on the 7th day, *Hoshana Rabbah*, he circled the altar seven times.

The importance of the Zechariah Scripture is that all the nations of the earth must one day come to recognize their connectedness to Israel as the nation that hosts the special presence of God, and it is also suggestive that the Holy Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem as prophesied in Ezekiel. Some also believe it is prophesied in Zechariah 6:12-13 which states:

*“Then speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: “Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of*

*the LORD; Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”*

This creates a special role for us as New Covenant priests and intercessors, to pray for the nations, that they will one day embrace their relationship with Israel, and acknowledge Israel as the place where Yeshua will return and the Temple will be rebuilt.

Per Leviticus 23:33-43, the holiday of *Sukkot* lasts for seven days beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month which is *Tishri* on the Jewish calendar. During the week of *Sukkot* we eat, pray, and sometimes even sleep in *sukkot* that we build ourselves in remembrance of when the ancient Israelites did the same in the Sinai desert. We keep the first day of *Sukkot* as a Sabbath (do no customary work on it), and we hold a holy convocation. On the eighth day (*Sh’mini Atzeret*), we do the same.

The materials out of which the Israelites made their *sukkot*—“the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook” (the four species, or *arba minim*) are what has given rise to the tradition of waiving the *lulav* (the four species wrapped together) and *etrog* (a lemon-like fruit).

All of this is good and pleasing to God so long as we do not forget the main reason for *Sukkot*, which is to reflect on being thankful to God for his provisions and, as we count our blessings, to remember that Yeshua is the ultimate and most important provision for which we have to be thankful.

—CJB

## **Tisha B'Av**

*Delivered August 9, 2008*

Last Tuesday I asked my *chavurah* some questions, and I would like to ask you the same questions.

First Question: “Who among you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Tisha B'Av*?” Please raise your hands.

Second Question: “Please raise your hand if you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Tu B'shvat*.”

Third Question: “Please raise your hand if you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Pesach*—Passover.”

Fourth Question: “Please raise your hand if you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Yom Kippur*.”

Do you notice how few of us are familiar with *Tisha B'Av* and *Tu B'shvat* compared with *Pesach* and *Yom Kippur*? That is because, as Messianic Judaism developed (Ohev being no exception), we rightly have given priority to days and times that were commanded in the *Torah* over those that were not. There are those non-commanded days with which we are fairly familiar, such as *Chanukah* and *Purim*, mostly because there are references to them in Scripture. *Simchat Torah* is not commanded either and we do celebrate that, but poor *Tu B'shvat* and *Tisha B'Av*! They've been pretty much ignored.

Well, starting at sundown tonight is *Tisha B'Av*, so what say, this year, we show it some kindness, and look at it more closely!

*Tisha B'Av* literally means “the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the month of *Av*, the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the Jewish calendar. In the Jewish world, *Tisha B'Av* is principally observed as a day for mourning the destruction of both Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple which allegedly were destroyed on the same date.

Regarding Solomon's Temple, [2 Kings 25:8-9](#) tells us:

*“And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire.”*

[Jeremiah 52:12-13](#) describes the event using a different date; it says:

*“Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire.”*

You notice that the Scriptures are the same, except that 2 Kings mentions the 7<sup>th</sup> day and Jeremiah mentions the 10<sup>th</sup> day; but neither of the Scriptures say that the “house of the Lord” was actually burned on either of those days. The traditional Jewish explanation for the timing of all of this is that Nebuzaradan arrived in Jerusalem on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Av, and set fire to the Temple on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>, so that the Temple burned through the 10<sup>th</sup>. That is why the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av was chosen as the commemoration date.

In 70 C.E., the Second Temple was destroyed by a heathen army as well, but the circumstances were different. During Yeshua’s lifetime and a shortwhile thereafter, Israel was treated as a favored nation by Rome. By 66 C.E., however, the tide had turned, and Israel was looked at as an unwanted nuisance. The Roman governor of Judea, Florius, actively persecuted the Jews in his jurisdiction, even to the extent of encouraging riots that resulted in Jewish deaths. At first, the Jews attempted a peaceful solution through negotiations, but when Roman troops charged into a group of peaceful marchers, a general revolt ensued. A Roman general, Vespian, began to methodically quell the revolt in Judea by first conquering and occupying cities in the northern Galilee. Finally, in 70 CE, he marched on Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple of God, causing Jews in Jerusalem to flee in all directions; and thus began what we now call the Jewish Diaspora (or dispersion).

Two Temples destroyed by a foreign enemy, two dislocations of the Jewish people and, according to Jewish traditional history, both occurring on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av. There were other tragedies in Jewish history that occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av as well, but the destructions of the Temples are the major foci of *Tisha B'Av*, and it is for these two temples that the early Jewish leaders proclaimed an annual day of fasting and mourning.

Now let us look at these destructions more closely. Is it not strange that Babylonia and Rome were able to burn Temples that God approved to be built? Perhaps not so strange, because there was a common cause for both, and that was the sin of Israel as a nation in rebelling against God. In the case of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile, the sin was breaching the Mosaic Covenant through disobedience to *Torah*. We know this because we have several Scriptures that describe the sin—for example, Isaiah 1:4:

*“Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward.”*

And the prophecy of Micah 3:8-12:

*“But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, And of justice and might, To declare to Jacob his transgression And to Israel his sin. Now hear this, You heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed And Jerusalem with iniquity: Her heads judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us.” Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the mountain of the temple Like the bare hills of the forest.”*

Because the Second Temple was destroyed after the last Scriptures were written, the biblical record of it is not as complete as it is for the First Temple. Nevertheless, we do have some foretelling of it, like in Matthew 24:1-2, and Mark 13:1-2, which are very similar:

Matthew 24:1-2: *“Then Yeshua went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Yeshua said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”*

Mark 13:1-2: *“Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” And Yeshua answered and said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”*

In the case of the Second Temple’s destruction and the Jewish dispersion that followed, the sin was probably breaching God’s covenant with Israel once again—this time the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. The breach consisted of most of Israel refusing to embrace it, their rejection of Yeshua, and their continuing to be disobedient to *Torah*. I say “probably,” because we do not have Scripture that addresses it.

Now back to *Tisha B'Av*. “Judaism 101” on the Internet describes *Tisha B'Av* this way:

*“Tisha B'Av, the Fast of the Ninth of Av, is a day of mourning to commemorate the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, many of which coincidentally have occurred on the ninth of Av. .... Tisha B'Av primarily commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples, both of which were destroyed on the ninth of Av (the first by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E.; the second by the Romans in 70 C.E. Although this holiday is primarily meant to commemorate the destruction of the Temple, it is appropriate to consider on this day the many other tragedies of the Jewish people, many of which occurred on this day, most notably the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.”*

*“Tisha B'Av is the culmination of a three week period of increasing mourning, beginning with the fast of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, which commemorates the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem, before the First Temple was destroyed. ....The restrictions on Tisha B'Av are similar to those on Yom Kippur: to refrain from eating and drinking (even water); washing, bathing, shaving or wearing cosmetics; wearing leather shoes; engaging in sexual relations; and studying Torah. Work in the ordinary sense of the word [rather than the Shabbat sense] is also restricted. People who are ill need not fast on this day. Many of the traditional mourning practices are observed; people refrain from smiles, laughter and idle conversation, and sit on low stools.”*

*“In the synagogue, the book of Lamentations is read and mourning prayers are recited. The ark is draped in black.”*

End of quote!



Well, it is not *Tisha B'Av* yet, but if it were, you would notice that this congregation and most of its members do not practice most of the restrictions I just read to you; some of us do comply with some of them, however. In future years, the elders may increase our participation, but for now let us just learn what we can about it so that we better understand the wider Jewish community, and can make personal decisions about how each of us will conduct our private lives on *Tisha B'Av*.

Perhaps the easiest way for me to proceed is to tell you where I am at regarding *Tisha B'Av*. First, when I say “where I’m at,” I mean that I am trying to hear the Holy Spirit on the matter, and am open to change if the Spirit directs me; that is the proper New Covenant approach to all such things, and I urge you to adopt the approach as well.

In my current way of thinking, I perceive that some level of recognition of *Tisha B'Av* is appropriate, but not for the same reason as is typically given by Jewish orthodoxy whose focus is on the Temples’ loss. I do not find it possible to mourn over the destruction of either Temple; I have never experienced Temple worship, and the most central sacrifice of the Temples—the sin sacrifice—is wholly taken care of by my having adopted Yeshua’s sacrifice as my own. I used to think that God took away the Second Temple because, after Yeshua, there was no longer a need for it. I do not think that way any longer because I see now that God took away both Temples as a response to Israel’s sin. Look! Here is what God said about his Temple to David:

*“He [meaning Solomon] shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:13).*

To Solomon, He said:

*“For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.” (2 Chronicles 7:16).*

Clearly, the Temple was a place where God’s Name, eyes, and heart were to dwell forever. It was not intended to be temporary, so one of the Temples would still be standing were it not for the sin of Israel. Now consider this: We know that the Temple sacrifices were never sufficient to take away sin; they could only cover it over. So, God always planned to send his Son to be our Savior, and the Holy Spirit to be our constant companion and source of communication with God whether or not there was a standing and functioning Temple. It follows, then, that the Temple and the Levitical Priesthood had a role that was consistent with Messiah, and had Israel not breached its covenants with God, I have no doubt that we would now have both Yeshua and the Temple. It is challenging to ponder how that would work, but work it would, because it is still going to happen. How do I know? Because it is prophesied; in [Isaiah 2:3](#) we read:

*“Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”*

Also, in [Ezekiel chapters 40 to 44](#) you can read a description of the future Temple, and in chapters 45 and 46 you can read a description of its functioning. I think that is God’s way of bringing everything

full circle. The Temple that is described in Ezekiel is probably the way either of the first two Temples would have been, had Israel not sinned.

Back to my observance of *Tisha B'Av*. I cannot mourn for the Temples, but I can deeply regret the sins of my people that brought their demise. So, I can relate to *Tisha B'Av* as a day for reflection and corporate repentance similar to the theme of *Yom Kippur*. I came to this conclusion earlier this week while preparing this message, and was astounded when, during our *chavurah* meeting, a quote was read from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch that is so right on, that I will repeat it to you; speaking of *Isaiah*, Hirsch says:

*“The prophet does not lament because the Beis HaMikdash [the Temple] was destroyed; rather he laments over the underlying causes of the destruction. And this annual lesson serves to focus the national mourning of Tisha B'Av not to the past but to the present.”*

Hirsch goes on to say:

*“We must use our mourning as a way of initiating an examination of our present day feelings, thoughts, and deeds. What have we done to eliminate the attitudes and practices that thousands of years ago sent our ancestors into exile—not once, but twice?”*

If, in future years, we aspire to a higher level of observing *Tisha B'Av*, I am sure that Rabbi Hirsch's commentary will be the chief rationale for it. I suspect that “mourning” is not the right response, however; rather, a theme of introspection, prayer and repentance seem more appropriate. There is, indeed, a similarity to the theme of *Yom Kippur*, but that day of repentance was commanded as part of the Mosaic Covenant and it required Temple sacrifices.

Let us keep in mind Rabbi Hirsch's admonition that we need to look to the present lest the same sin that befell our forefathers should befall us, and we repeat history.

Perhaps between now and next year, some of you will receive wisdom from God about *Tisha B'Av* and you will share it with us. Meanwhile, tonight some of you will be visiting another synagogue where Lamentations will be chanted in a traditional way. That is a good thing to do for several reasons, not the least of which is that the Book of Lamentations is generally not addressed in other Jewish contexts.

—NKJ

## The Weekly Sabbath

*Delivered April 27, 2019*

The entire Bible-believing world regards the Ten Commandments as foundational. Ask a non-Jewish believer at random if he believes it is acceptable to worship gods other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and he will say “No.” Ask him if making idols is allowed and he will likewise say “No.” And taking God’s name in vain? “No.” What about honoring our father and mother? A no brainer! And committing murder, adultery, theft, and false witness? “Very bad.” What about coveting that which is our neighbor’s? “Also, bad.” And keeping the Sabbath? “Also, bbaaa ... wait a minute!” The words do not come as quickly for the Fourth Commandment because the majority of Bible-believers in the world disregard the words of Exodus 20:8-11:

*“Remember the day, Shabbat, to set it apart for God. You have six days to labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat for ADONAI your God. On it, you are not to do any kind of work—not you, your son or your daughter; not your male or female slave, not your livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property. For in six days, ADONAI made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. This is why ADONAI blessed the day, Shabbat, and separated it for himself.”*

The history of how this retreat from observing the Sabbath happened goes back to the time of the Roman emperor Constantine whose decrees protected Christians so long as they did not hold themselves out as being related to Jews. Christians under his control sought protection by distancing themselves from all things Jewish, and that included keeping the seventh day Sabbath. So, by the fourth century, Christians (by then Catholics) were considering their day of corporate gathering and prayer to be the first day of the week instead of the seventh. This coincided with the practice of the early believers in Yeshua (both Jews and non-Jews) to meet in each other’s homes for prayer and fellowship on the first day of the week, and also with the day of the week that Yeshua was resurrected. Later, meeting and worshiping on the first day of the week became institutionalized as the “Lord’s Day” in many parts of Christendom and, influenced by the “church father” Eusebius, began to be referred to as “Sabbath” for Christians.

Keeping the Sabbath has been said to no longer be appropriate for either Jews or Gentiles in the New Covenant. The most general objection is based on Hebrews 4:1-11 which has been interpreted in some Christian circles as meaning that since we are to rest in Yeshua, he has become our Sabbath rest, and therefore resting on the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer required or even appropriate; Hebrews 4:1-11 states:

*“Therefore, let us be terrified of the possibility that, even though the promise of entering his rest remains, any one of you might be judged to have fallen short of it; for Good News has also been proclaimed to us, just as it was to them. But the message they heard didn’t do them any good, because those who heard it did not combine it with trust. For it is we who have trusted who enter the rest. It is just as he said, “And in my anger, I swore that they would not enter my rest.” He swore this even though his works have been in existence since the founding of the universe. For there is a place where it is said, concerning the seventh day, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And once more, our present text says, “They will not enter*

*my rest.” Therefore, since it still remains for some to enter it, and those who received the Good News earlier did not enter, he again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David, so long afterwards, in the text already given, “Today, if you hear God’s voice, don’t harden your hearts.” For if Y’hoshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later of another “day.” So there remains a Shabbat-keeping for God’s people. For the one who has entered God’s rest has also rested from his own works, as God did from his. Therefore, let us do our best to enter that rest; so that no one will fall short because of the same kind of disobedience.”*

This Scripture, together with those below, seem to some to relegate the seventh-day Sabbath to a mere shadow of our resting in Yeshua, making observance of the Sabbath day unimportant:

Matthew 11:28-30: *“Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Colossians 2:16-17: *“So don’t let anyone pass judgment on you in connection with eating and drinking, or in regard to a Jewish festival or Rosh-Hodesh or Shabbat. These are a shadow of things that are coming, but the body is of the Messiah.”*

What is not considered by those who believe that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath by Israel is now unimportant, is that resting on the Sabbath is intended by God to be a weekly remembrance that He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh:

Genesis 2:1-3: *“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, along with everything in them. On the seventh day God was finished with his work which he had made, so he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. God blessed the seventh day and separated it as holy; because on that day God rested from all his work which he had created, so that it itself could produce.”*

Also, it is to be a sign for all generations that God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt in order to set them apart and make them a holy people:

Exodus 31:13-14: *“Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘You are to observe my Shabbats; for this is a sign between me and you through all your generations; so that you will know that I am ADONAI, who sets you apart for me. Therefore you are to keep my Shabbat, because it is set apart for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it is to be cut off from his people.”*

Ezekiel 20:10-12: *“So I had them leave the land of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my laws and showed them my rulings; if a person obeys them, he will have life through them. I gave them my shabbats as a sign between me and them, so that they would know that I, ADONAI, am the one who makes them holy.”*

Although the Sabbath was principally given to the Israelites (the Jewish People), there are two categories of Gentiles for whom it was also given. First, are the Gentiles who stood at the foot of

Mount Sinai, had joined themselves to the community of Israel, and had therefore received the Covenant. Today, we call such Gentiles *K'rovei Yisrael*:

*Deuteronomy 29:9(10)-14(15): “Today you are standing, all of you, before ADONAI your God—your heads, your tribes, your leaders and your officers—all the men of Isra’el, along with your little ones, your wives and your foreigners here with you in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. The purpose is that you should enter into the covenant of ADONAI your God and into his oath which ADONAI your God is making with you today, so that he can establish you today for himself as a people, and so that for you he will be God—as he said to you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Avraham, Yitz’chak and Ya’akov. But I am not making this covenant and this oath only with you. Rather, I am making it both with him who is standing here with us today before ADONAI our God and also with him who is not here with us today.”*

In my opinion, *K'rovei Yisrael* have an obligation to the *Shabbat* that is equal to that of the Jews in their Jewish communities because *K'rovei Yisrael* have voluntarily covenanted to take upon themselves the same obligations as their Jewish brothers. The difference is that with Jews, the covenantal obligations are inherited, whereas with *K'rovei Yisrael*, they are voluntary with each generation.

The second category of Gentiles for whom the *Shabbat* has relevance is the category of all Gentiles. To Gentiles broadly, I do not speak of their *obligation* to keep the Sabbath, but rather of blessings if they do, and lost blessings if they do not. It is clearly stated in [Isaiah 56:1-7](#) which addresses eunuchs who were lowest in the social order of the Gentiles (foreigners) of their day:

*“Here is what ADONAI says: “Observe justice, do what is right, for my salvation is close to coming, my righteousness to being revealed. Happy is the person who does this, anyone who grasps it firmly, who keeps Shabbat and does not profane it, and keeps himself from doing any evil. A foreigner joining ADONAI should not say, “ADONAI will separate me from his people”; likewise the eunuch should not say, “I am only a dried-up tree.” For here is what ADONAI says: “As for the eunuchs who keep my Shabbats, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant: in my house, within my walls, I will give them power and a name greater than sons and daughters; I will give him an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to ADONAI to serve him, to love the name of ADONAI, and to be his workers, all who keep Shabbat and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”*

That leaves one matter before I close this teaching, and that is how God wants us to keep the *Shabbat*. This is the most difficult of all on which to take a position because we have liberty in the New Covenant, and each person’s situation is unique. I will, however, point out a few ways that are inescapably biblical.

First and most foundational, we are to do no work of the kind that is ordinary for us. So, for example, that would seem to preclude an artist, who earns his living painting, from painting or drawing on *Shabbat* unless it is for God’s glory and not for remuneration:

Leviticus 23:2-3: “Tell the people of Isra’el: ‘The designated times of ADONAI which you are to proclaim as holy convocations are my designated times. Work is to be done on six days; but the seventh day is a Shabbat of complete rest, a holy convocation; you are not to do any kind of work; it is a Shabbat for ADONAI, even in your homes” (see also, Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Notice that I introduced the exception “for God’s glory.” That is because we have the example of the Levitical priests conducting sacrifices on *Shabbat* and the other “appointed times” in which doing ordinary work was prohibited for others.

Another exception is illustrated in Matthew 12:10-12:

*“A man there had a shriveled hand. Looking for a reason to accuse him [Yeshua] of something, they asked him, “Is healing permitted on Shabbat?” But he answered, “If you have a sheep that falls in a pit on Shabbat, which of you won’t take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore, what is permitted on Shabbat is to do good.”*

Yeshua followed it up by saying in Mark 2:27b-28:

*“Shabbat was made for mankind, not mankind for Shabbat; so the Son of Man is Lord even of Shabbat.”*

There are so many variations of what we can do, what we should not do, and possible exceptions, that it is essential that each of us consult the Holy Spirit for wisdom in prayer. I think, however, that Isaiah 58:13-14 states the main principle:

*“If you hold back your foot on Shabbat from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call Shabbat a delight, ADONAI’s holy day, worth honoring; then honor it by not doing your usual things or pursuing your interests or speaking about them. If you do, you will find delight in ADONAI—I will make you ride on the heights of the land and feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Ya’akov, for the mouth of ADONAI has spoken.”*

The principle seems to be that we ought not do on the *Shabbat* that which is ordinary unless it is to do good and is for God’s glory. *Shabbat* is a time to rest from ordinary work and ordinary activities, and dwell, instead, on things of God. Whether we should drive on *Shabbat*, light campfires on *Shabbat*, or attend Messianic Jewish conferences on *Shabbat* where hotel employees work to house us, feed us, and keep us safe, I leave unanswered and refer you to the Holy Spirit.

—CJB

## Yom Kippur

*Delivered October 4, 2014*

Leviticus 23:26-28 in the New King James reads:

*“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God.’”*

Of all the biblical Holy Days, New Covenant believers often ask of *Yom Kippur*: “Why do we continue to observe it? After all, did Yeshua not die for our sins so that Israel would not have to continually depend on the annual sin sacrifice?” The answer is, of course, that Yeshua is our atoning sacrifice, but verses 29 through 32 read as follows:

*“For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”* (NKJ).

The idea of afflicting our souls has been universally interpreted by Judaism as fasting, the discomfort of which is often thought of almost as a form of punishment. I do not see it that way. I believe that the affliction of our souls refers to the genuine regret we must have for the sins we have committed and the difficulty (sometimes painful difficulty) of discontinuing them once and for all. Thought of in that way, fasting along with prayer is highly appropriate as a means of helping us to do it.

Another thing. The phrase in the New King James version that has always struck me as perplexing is: “it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.” I previously thought that “forever” meant “forever,” but I now have a different understanding. The Hebrew word that is translated “forever” in the New King James (and other translations) is “*olam*,” and its literal meaning is not “forever,” but it is rather “to the distant horizon,” or “to a far distant time.” In other words, the English translation “*it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations*” does not have to mean “forever,” but could very well mean “*it shall be a statute throughout your generations so long as this covenant I am making with you continues to exist.*” Were it otherwise and “*olam*” really meant “forever,” we would still be conducting the *Yom Kippur* animal sacrifice, because animal sacrifice is a key component of the Leviticus statute.

God knew that the covenant He gave under Moses would someday change, that there would someday be no Temple in which to sacrifice, and that Messiah Yeshua would become our atoning sacrifice. Still, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us that:

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.”* .

True, we cannot perform the commanded animal sacrifice, but we can comply with everything else in the statute. We can have a holy convocation, we can afflict our souls, and we can abstain from work. And today, we are here doing all of those things. Still, I do want us to have some deeper understanding of how to reconcile our faith in Yeshua with continuing to observe Yom Kippur.

When the Yom Kippur sacrifices ceased in 70 AD because of the Temple’s destruction, only those Jews who believed in Yeshua had a Judaism that remained intact. The majority of Jews who depended on the Temple sacrifices for their forgiveness were catapulted into a crisis, and the outcome was an entirely new religious system that came to be called “Rabbinical Judaism.” Instead of animal sacrifices (which they could no longer have), this new Judaism called for personal sacrifices such as obedience to the commandments of the *Torah*, and good works such as the giving of *tzadaka*.

It should be evident to us why those things are insufficient. First, obedience to the *Torah* was already required even while the Temple stood. Similarly, good works such as *tzadaka* were already required, and third, the *Torah*’s requirement of animal blood sacrifice could no longer be complied with so one could not completely obey the commandments of the *Torah*. This is especially problematic, because [Hebrews 9:22](#) teaches:

*“In fact, according to the Torah, almost everything is purified with blood; indeed, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”* .

The new Jewish system still had the Holy Scriptures and it still had the oral traditions but, in rejecting Yeshua as its sacrifice, it no longer had a blood sacrifice for the remission of sin. What the rabbis said were substitutes were not substitutes at all, because they were already required prior to the Temple’s destruction. By contrast, the Messianic Jews of that day had no such crisis, and no need to form a new religious system because they had their blood sacrifice—Yeshua. Connected to that there is something very important that we need to do to fulfill our *Yom Kippur* obligation, and that is to examine ourselves and repent of any and all sins that we find. That was important for the Israelites of old and for the High Priest as well.

As I was preparing this *Yom Kippur* message, I looked back at last year’s teaching and was reminded of a comparison I made between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant in regard to sacrifice and repentance. Because it is so foundational for our understanding of *Yom Kippur*, I want to share it with you again, so here goes:

1. In the Mosaic Covenant, the priesthood order was of Aaron. In the New Covenant, the priesthood order is of Mechizedek ([Psalms 110:4](#); [Hebrews 5:6](#), [10](#), [7:11](#)).
2. In the Mosaic Covenant, Aaron was High Priest. In the New Covenant, Yeshua is High Priest ([Hebrews 5:9](#), [6:20](#)).



3. In the Mosaic Covenant, Israel was described as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” in which Aaron and his sons were appointed the priests. In the New Covenant, all who are believers in Yeshua, have become “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” known as the “Commonwealth of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12 (NKJ)) and therefore all believers in Yeshua have become “New Covenant” priests (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5-11; Revelation 1:4-6, 5:10).
4. In the Mosaic Covenant, shedding the blood of animals was required for the remission of sin. In the New Covenant, the shed blood of Yeshua is required for the remission of sin (Hebrews 9:11-12, 18, 22).
5. In the Mosaic Covenant, the blood of animals could not remove sin. In the New Covenant, the shed blood of Yeshua does remove sin (Hebrews 9:25-26; 10:3, 11-12, 17).
6. In the Mosaic Covenant, the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place in the earthly Tabernacle once each year with animal blood. In the New Covenant, Yeshua entered the Most Holy Place in the Heavenly Tabernacle, once, for all, with his own blood (Hebrews 9:6-7, 11-12, 25-26, 28, 10:12).
7. In the Mosaic Covenant, only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place. In the New Covenant, we who have become New Covenant priests can enter the Most Holy Place with Yeshua (Leviticus 16:17; Hebrews 9:7, 10:19-22).
8. Finally, in the Mosaic Covenant, the High Priest placed the sins of Israel on a scapegoat. In the New Covenant, Yeshua, the High Priest, takes the sins of Israel upon himself (Leviticus 16:3-10, 21-22; Hebrews 9:6-15).

I want to read the text of these last-mentioned Scriptures to you to give you a better feel for what was done on *Yom Kippur* in the early years:

Leviticus 16:3-10 reads:

*“Here is how Aharon is to enter the Holy Place: with a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering. He is to put on the holy linen tunic, have the linen shorts next to his bare flesh, have the linen sash wrapped around him, and be wearing the linen turban—they are the holy garments. He is to bathe his body in water and put them on. He is to take from the community of the people of Isra’el two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. Aharon is to present the bull for the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and his household. He is to take the two goats and place them before ADONAI at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aharon is to cast lots for the two goats, one lot for ADONAI and the other for ‘Az’azel. Aharon is to present the goat whose lot fell to ADONAI and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat whose lot fell to ‘Az’azel is to be presented alive to ADONAI to be used for making atonement over it by sending it away into the desert for ‘Az’azel.”*

And continuing at Leviticus 16:21-22:

*“Aharon is to lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the transgressions, crimes and sins of the people of Isra’el; he is to put them on the head of the goat and then send it away into the desert with a man appointed for the purpose. The goat will bear all their transgressions away to some isolated place, and he is to let the goat go in the desert.”* .

Hebrews 9:6-15 refers to this as well, and explains how the Levitical sacrifice was a mere shadow of Yeshua’s greater sacrifice:

*“With things so arranged, the cohanim go into the outer tent all the time to discharge their duties; but only the cohen hagadol enters the inner one; and he goes in only once a year, and he must always bring blood, which he offers both for himself and for the sins committed in ignorance by the people. By this arrangement, the Ruach HaKodesh showed that so long as the first Tent had standing, the way into the Holiest Place was still closed. This symbolizes the present age and indicates that the conscience of the person performing the service cannot be brought to the goal by the gifts and sacrifices he offers. For they involve only food and drink and various ceremonial washings—regulations concerning the outward life, imposed until the time for God to reshape the whole structure. But when the Messiah appeared as cohen gadol of the good things that are happening already, then, through the greater and more perfect Tent which is not man-made (that is, it is not of this created world), he entered the Holiest Place once and for all. And he entered not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus setting people free forever. For if sprinkling ceremonially unclean persons with the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer restores their outward purity; then how much more the blood of the Messiah, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself to God as a sacrifice without blemish, will purify our conscience from works that lead to death, so that we can serve the living God! It is because of this death that he is mediator of a new covenant [or will]. Because a death has occurred which sets people free from the transgressions committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.”* .

Notice that the burnt offering was for the sins of the High Priest and for the “sins committed in ignorance by the people,” but the sacrifice of the scapegoat was for ALL sin. But you say ... “The scapegoat had to be presented alive before the Lord, and Yeshua died.” Yes, Yeshua died a physical death (as did the scapegoat in the wilderness), but Yeshua was resurrected back to life, and he presented himself live before the Father where, even now, he is alive and at the Father’s right hand.

So now we have the entire background of *Yom Kippur*; from both the Mosaic and New Covenant perspectives. In the Mosaic Covenant, there was a covering over of sin—hence the word *kippur* that means “covering.” Hebrews 8:6 tells us that the New Covenant is based on better promises, and one of the best of those is that, in Yeshua, our sins are not just covered over—they are entirely taken away. Many of our Jewish people do not know Yeshua and therefore cannot get their sins entirely taken away. If any of you in this room, Jew or non-Jew, have not yet invited Yeshua into your heart and life, this is the time God wants you to do it. Just pray silently and ask Yeshua into your heart. Tell him that you want him to direct your life, and that you want to enter his kingdom right now, here on earth. If you pray that prayer, he will do it because John 3:16 tells us that God:

*“...sent His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him will have eternal life.”* (NKJ).

And Yeshua himself said in Matthew 11:28-30:

*“Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

And he is also quoted in Revelation 3:20-21:

*“Here, I’m standing at the door, knocking. If someone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he will eat with me. I will let him who wins the victory sit with me on my throne, just as I myself also won the victory and sat down with my Father on his throne.”*

So, let us now pause. If anyone here prayed to receive Yeshua, he came into you through the Holy Spirit at that very moment. If you did not, the opportunity is not lost. Come speak to any of our leaders after the service and ask them about Yeshua—how you too can be his, and have eternal life with God.

In a few minutes we will have a short period of prayer intercession for Israel where we will ask God to reveal Yeshua to the Jewish people and bring us to a decision of salvation.

Notice I said “us” and not them. That is because as Jews and Gentiles in a Messianic Jewish community, we consider all Jewish people—not only believers in Yeshua—to be part of our Jewish family; hence we pray as “us”—not “them.” Before we do that, however, like the High Priest of old, we must examine ourselves and repent of our personal sins, and so let us begin our intercession with an “*Al Chet*” prayer, confessing the individual sins of Israel, and asking God to forgive. Once again, we will intercede for Israel in the first person—“us”—not “them.”

A Modified *Al Chet* prayer was given to you earlier. *Al Chet* needs to be approached with a certain mindset, since the prayer contains a lengthy list of sins that we confess whether or not we believe we have personally committed them. The reason we pray this way is that we are praying corporately—not individually. We are confessing the sins of our people Israel, wherever in the world we may be, the assumption being that surely each and every one of the listed sins has applied to at least one of us some time within the past year. Of course, if we come across a sin that applies to us personally, we need to pause and repent before going on. Finally, there will always be sins that were committed in the course of the year that did not find their way onto the list. For that reason, we should think of the listed sins as sin categories, and recite them with a heart understanding that any sins not explicitly mentioned are, nevertheless, intended.

So, let us now stand and pray *Al Chet* with heart-felt *kavanah*, knowing that in Yeshua, our sins are forgiven. Anyone who cannot stand comfortably may remain seated.

—CJB



# **B. Messianic Judaism**

## **Sermons • Vol 1**



## Bar Mitzvah and Torah Observance

*Delivered June 23, 2007*

Michael, today you had your *Bar Mitzvah* and it is well known that *Bar Mitzvah* means different things to different people. To some it is just something they have to endure in order to please their parents. They study to get through it and hope never to have to think about what they studied again. Others look forward to their *Bar Mitzvah* because it is a time to party and get gifts. Still others understand it as a rite of passage—a day when they are received by their community as an adult and are given adult responsibilities. This latter way to look at it is correct; the first two are, of course, not.

But there is something even more to this than it being a rite of passage and coming into adulthood. The key to understanding *Bar Mitzvah's* deeper significance is in the words themselves. *Bar Mitzvah* is an Aramaic term that means “Son of Commandment.” Some believe that by accepting *Bar Mitzvah*, a young man is committing to keep literally, every one of the 613 commandments given at Mt. Sinai and subsequently written in the Torah. I suggest to you that it cannot mean that, because no one today—not you and not I—can comply literally with every commandment in the *Torah*.

Does my statement surprise you? Let me show you some examples of what I mean. Take for instance Leviticus 23:27:

*“Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.”*

From other parts of the Bible we know that the Yom Kippur offering is an animal sacrifice. Who then can keep *Yom Kippur* today exactly the way the Bible instructs? Yeshua our Messiah became our sacrifice for sin, so today the offering made by fire commanded in Leviticus is both unauthorized and unneeded. Not only that, doing the sacrifice the way it was intended is now impossible because there is no longer a standing Temple in which to conduct it.

Consider also Deuteronomy 21:18-21:

*“If a man has a stubborn, rebellious son who will not obey what his father or mother says, and even after they discipline him he still refuses to pay attention to them; then his father or mother are to take hold of him and bring him out to the leaders of his town, at the gate of that place, and say to the leaders of his town, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he doesn’t pay attention to us, lives wildly, gets drunk. Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death; in this way you will put an end to such wickedness among you, and all Isra’el will hear about it and be afraid.’”*

Who among us believes that God wants and expects us today to deliver our rebellious children to be stoned? Of course not. Our local governments today are not ancient Israel, nor are they governments seeking to be led by God.

Here's another one—Deuteronomy 25:5:

*“If brothers live together, and one of them dies childless, his widow is not to marry someone unrelated to him; her husband's brother is to go to her and perform the duty of a brother-in-law by marrying her.”*

Well that is all very well and good so long as the brother-in-law is not already married. If he is already married, obeying this statute literally results in his having two wives which is contrary to the laws of these United States.

Clearly, being a *Bar Mitzvah*, a Son of Commandment, has to mean something other than obeying every commandment in Torah literally. At the same time, are there not many commandments that we do obey literally? Do we not literally seek to love God and love our neighbor? Don't we literally refrain from murder? Don't we literally cease from work and rest on the Sabbath? Although Deuteronomy 27:1 instructs Isra'el to “Observe *all* the *mitzvot* (the commandments of *Torah*),” in today's New Covenant we observe some literally and others not.

Being a *Bar Mitzvah*, a Son of Commandment, is indeed a commitment to being *Torah*-observant, but judgment has to be applied in the application. It is a funny world. Some people believe that since Yeshua died for our sins all law has been done away with, while at the same time others believe that obeying God's law requires complete literal compliance with all commandments, making no attempt at all to exercise judgment. These latter folks would say that anyone who seeks to exercise judgment in the application of God's commandments are either liberals in their use of Scripture or are not really Bible believers. I can show you that neither of these positions are correct, that God himself exercises judgment in applying his Word, and that He expects the same of us.

Let us look at Leviticus 18:4-5 as rendered by the New King James Version:

*“You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”*

The Complete Jewish Bible translates these verses similarly but uses the word “rulings” instead of “judgments,” and the word “laws” instead of “statutes” and “ordinances.” Those substitutes are instructive because “statutes,” “ordinances,” and “laws” are explicit directives, while “judgments” and “rulings” are discerning decisions that God himself makes when He assesses his own directives. The Torah has always consisted of, not only commandments, but also of discerning interpretive judgments.

Let me show you a biblical example of that principle that just about blew me away when I first saw it. In Leviticus 10 we read how two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, sinned against God and were summarily slain. Later that day, Moses instructed Aaron and his two remaining sons on how to conduct a very important sacrifice that God commanded. These instructions were very detailed and were apparently very important because when Moses came back to check and found that they had not done what he had directed them he became angry and said to them in Leviticus 10:17-18:



*“Why have you not eaten the sin offering in a holy place, since it is most holy, and God has given it to you to bear the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? See! Its blood was not brought inside the holy place; indeed you should have eaten it in a holy place, as I commanded.”*

Leviticus 10:19-20:

*“And Aaron said to Moses, “Look, this day they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and such things have befallen me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been accepted in the sight of the LORD?” So when Moses heard that, he was content.”*

What we see here is Aaron and his remaining sons failing to follow detailed directives given by God, presumably because they were in mourning for Nadab and Abihu or were in some other impure state of mind and spirit. Perhaps they were even angry with God. In any event, after Moses heard their explanation for not conducting the sacrifice, he was satisfied that they had done the right thing, and presumably God was also satisfied because we do not read of God punishing them for their disobedience. This is an example of Aaron exercising judgment in the application of God’s explicit commandment, and God affirming, by his silence, that Aaron did the right thing.

Michael, as a *Bar Mitzvah*, God expects you, like Aaron, to be observant of *Torah* but, at the same time, discerning in how you apply it. The reason you can discern as Aaron did is that you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you also and, if you listen, the Holy Spirit will give you wisdom in your application of *Torah*. Being *Torah*-observant in the New Covenant *does* require knowledge of God’s commandments, but it is not a mere exercise in rule-keeping. Rather, it is an exercise in Holy Spirit discernment and knowing the mind and heart of God. That is what God meant when he prophesied through Jeremiah:

*“I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. “(Jeremiah 31:32(33)-33(34))*

Michael, do not listen to anyone who tells you that you should not be *Torah*-observant because you are not a Jew. Also, never think that you are not adequately observing *Torah* just because someone else comes to a different conclusion about an issue than you and, as a result, conducts himself in a different way. In your *Torah*-observance there may be some instances where the way you keep *Torah* will reflect your Gentile identity, but you have chosen to be part of a Jewish community in your congregational life, and *Torah*-observance is characteristic of a Jewish community.

Michael, as a *Bar Mitzvah*, a Son of Commandment, and especially a Gentile Son of Commandment in a Messianic Jewish congregation, you have unique and valuable things to impart to those who will observe your life and come to know you. The first is your faith in Messiah Yeshua, testifying to all of God’s gracious provisions, including his provision for the salvation of all who will knock and invite Yeshua to enter. The second is your faith in Messiah Yeshua exhibited in a Jewish context, testifying

to the Jewishness of the New Testament, the New Covenant faith, and the Gentile believer's connection to Israel. The third is your example of being a *Torah*-observant Gentile living as part of a Jewish community, testifying to the universal value of God's law, and of the unity and equality of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah Yeshua.

So, Michael, your identity as a *Bar Mitzvah*, a Son of Commandment, is a great and valuable one, perhaps made even more valuable by your being a Gentile Messianic believer rather than a Jew.

I pray that you will embrace your *Bar Mitzvah* with a sense of purpose, calling, and excitement, as you take your place among the adults of your congregation, going forward in your observance of *Torah* in the power and discernment of the Holy Spirit, and blessing all whom God causes to cross your path.

—CJB

## **Beit Midrash, Beit T'filah, and Beit K'neset**

*Delivered April 28, 2007*

When Yeshua needed to offer a sacrifice in compliance with the Law, he brought it to the *Beit Mikdash*—the Jerusalem Temple. When he met with his close disciples to teach and fellowship, he typically chose informal venues—often out of doors. When he retired to pray, he often did so alone. But when he prayed, taught, ministered, studied, and debated *Torah* with the men of the community, he went to the nearest *Bet K'neset*—the house of assembly known as the synagogue.

Mark 1:21-22: *“Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”*

Mark 1:23-25: *“Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Yeshua of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” But Yeshua rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!””*

Mark 3:1-3: *“And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, “Step forward.”*

We know the rest; Yeshua healed the man.

Mark 6:2: *And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!”*

One more example:

Luke 4:16-20: *“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.”*

So, you can see from these examples, Yeshua was thoroughly involved with the synagogue which, by his time, had developed into a Jewish institution that operated in parallel with the *Bet Mikdash*, the Temple. While the Temple functioned mainly for sacrifice, the synagogue was the main *Beit T'filah* (House of Prayer), and typically also served as a *Beit Midrash* or House of Study. All of these functions came together in the synagogue, the *Beit K'neset*.

I have noticed that we have been reluctant to refer to our building as a synagogue—possibly because the word is so thoroughly associated with the part of the Jewish world that does not yet recognize Yeshua. I think that is a mistake. For now, we may want to call our place of meeting a “Messianic Synagogue” (as though that really makes things clearer), but since belief in Yeshua is the future for all of Judaism, when all of Judaism comes to faith, all synagogues will be Messianic.

Let us look at the historic synagogue and compare ours to it. We are definitely a *Beit T'filah*—a house of prayer because our whole community comes together every *Shabbat* and on every biblical Holy Day to pray and worship God in music, dance, liturgy, and in personal expression. We are also a *Beit K'neset*—a house of meeting, because our building is the place of assembly for all of our functions that include our community's celebrations, *onegs*, *chavurot*, and occasions of prayer. But my question to you today is, are we adequately fulfilling our responsibility of being a *Beit Midrash*—a house of study?

While it is true that our services and *chavurot* incorporate teachings such as this one, they are not—by historic Jewish standards—studies. Studies are what happen on *Shabbat* afternoons after services—our *Beit Midrash*, our *Torah Study*, and our courses in Hebrew. Studies are also what occur in our *Shabbat School* and in our *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* training. Studies involve not only lectures, but students interactively engaged in questioning, analyzing, and in discussing with one another. So yes, we offer many venues of study, but too few of our adult members participate.

I concede that it is difficult for some families to participate in after-service studies because of childcare issues, but what of the rest of us? What of our youth? Here is surely an appropriate opportunity for our youth and our older folks to come together in a valuable shared activity. Even among our older members, relatively few have taken advantage of the *Shabbat* afternoon studies which I can tell you from personal observation are well administered, well planned, and well taught by our own highly knowledgeable brothers and sisters. The breadth and quality of our *Shabbat* afternoon *Bet Midrash* is unique among Messianic Jewish congregations, and there is no tuition! No charge! It is free! Also, except for the Hebrew course, there is no week to week commitment of attendance or requirement to study at home. Study sessions do not build on one another; each session stands on its own, so attending is as easy as dropping in.

So, I ask again, why don't more of us participate in our congregation as a *Beit Midrash*—a house of study? Is it just the tiredness of the previous work week, or could it be that some of us have come into Messianic Judaism falsely indoctrinated that knowledge is the opponent of faith? I am thinking that some of that thinking is possible because I have heard several misapplications of 1 Corinthians 8:1b-2 which states:

“...*We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.*”

Without fail, those who quoted that Scripture in my hearing left out the contextual first half of verse 1 which reads:

“*Now concerning things offered to idols:*”

I have also heard reference to Adam eating of “the tree of knowledge” as being the source of our fallen world. Need I remind us that it was not a “tree of knowledge,” but the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” that Satan used to tempt Eve?

In preparation for this message, I copied from my Bible seven pages of Scriptures that prove beyond a doubt that God wants his people to receive significant instruction and have knowledge of the good kind—especially knowledge of God and God’s Law. Please indulge me while I read some of these to you:

A. First, Scriptures about learning and being learned (“learn-ed”):

Proverbs 1:5: *“A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,”*

Proverbs 9:9-10: *“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*

Proverbs 16:23: *“The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, And adds learning to his lips.”*

Isaiah 50:4: *“The Lord GOD has given Me The tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.”*

Acts 7:22: *“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.”*

2 Timothy 3:14: *“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,”*

B. Now here are some Scriptures about teachers and teaching:

John 6:45: *“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”*

1 Corinthians 12:28: *“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.”*

Ephesians 4:11-12: *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Messiah,”*

Titus 2:1-3: *“But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise,*

*that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—*”

C. Here is a sampling of Scriptures that demonstrate God’s value of knowledge. Please lean back and relax because I am going to take some time reading them to you in order to clearly make the point:

Exodus 31:1-3: *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,..””*

Deuteronomy 1:13: *“Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.”*

Deuteronomy 6:6-9: *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

1 Samuel 2:3: *“Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth, For the LORD is the God of knowledge; And by Him actions are weighed.”*

2 Chronicles 1:9-12: *“Now, O LORD God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. “Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?” And God said to Solomon: “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king—wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like.”*

2 Chronicles 30:22a: *“And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the LORD;”*

Psalms 119:64-66: *“The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy; Teach me Your statutes. You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments.”*

Proverbs 1:22: *“How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge.”*

Proverbs 10:14: *“Wise people store up knowledge, But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.”*

Proverbs 12:1: *“Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction is stupid.”*

Proverbs 18:15: *“The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”*

Proverbs 19:2: *“Also it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, And he sins who hastens with his feet.”*

Proverbs 21:11: *“When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise; But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.”*

Proverbs 24:5: *“A wise man is strong, yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;”*

Jeremiah 10:14: *“Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge; Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image; For his molded image is falsehood, And there is no breath in them.”*

Daniel 1:17: *“As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.”*

Hosea 4:6: *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”*

Hosea 6:3: *“Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.”*

Malachi 2:7: *“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.”*

Romans 15:13-14: *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”*

1 Corinthians 1:4-5: *“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Messiah Yeshua, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,”*

Philippians 1:8-10: *“For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Yeshua the Messiah. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Messiah,”*

*2 Peter 1:5-7: “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, <sup>7</sup> to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.”*

I hope these Scriptures have convinced you that the *Beit Midrash*—house of study for the acquisition of godly knowledge, is a biblical institution—a vital part of the synagogue, and one in which Yeshua himself participated. So why not you?

—NKJ



## Conformity and Diversity in Messianic Judaism

*Delivered November 12, 2011*

Marie and I are friends with a family that moved away from Washington D.C. and also from Messianic Judaism several years ago. After exploring several Christian options, they began to worship in a conservative Mennonite church.

There were several things that attracted my friends to the church, but several that eventually led to difficulty within their family. The husband liked the simple life practiced by the Mennonites, which included plainness of dress, biblical piety, and separation from things of the world—all positives, it would seem, until a congregant might object to one or another of the church's requirements (extended even to the privacy of one's home), and would find him or herself viewed as an outsider. That was what the wife experienced (to her dismay), when she was confronted with having to conform to strict community standards such as these:

- The color red could not be worn on any item of clothing.
- Cape dresses were expected to be worn by women in order to hide their female contours.
- Women were expected to keep their heads covered at all times.
- No jewelry was allowed to be worn.
- Men were required to be clean shaven.
- There could be no dancing of any kind.
- Service in the military and voting in national and local elections were not allowed.
- Watching movies was prohibited, as was having a television in one's home.
- Children were discouraged from asking their teachers to confirm with Scripture, what was taught.
- Non-members (even longstanding visitors) were discouraged from dressing like Mennonites if they were not Mennonites.

Telling you about our friends' experience with the Mennonites is my way of introducing what I really want to talk to you about today, which are the lifestyle and standards of our own community. Our standards and expectations are mostly different from those of Conservative Mennonites yet, in a few ways, they are similar. We are similar in that we seek to formulate our community's standards from our biblical understanding, but we are different in that we include, among our standards, those derived from our Jewish identity and culture. An obvious way in which we are different is that Mennonites consider Sunday to be the Sabbath, whereas we keep the seventh day Sabbath that was commanded to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. A way we are similar is that modest dress is a goal, but we are different in that *our* way of dressing—especially for services—is more contemporary, and partially derived from Jewish custom and tradition. Our preference is that men cover their heads during prayer, but we have no such expectation for women except when they read from the *bima*.

A way in which we are similar is that Mennonites do not want non-Mennonites to dress in Mennonite garb; similarly, we prefer that non-committed Gentiles not wear the *tallit*, which is considered Jewish garb. Dissimilar, is that the Mennonites of the church I described consider it disrespectful for children to ask their Bible teachers for supportive Scriptures, whereas we encourage it.

We, being Messianic Jewish, have a challenge that most Christian churches do not have. A goal of every Mennonite church and most other Christian churches is to achieve homogeneity in their memberships. They want members who are similar to one another in calling and lifestyle, and they hope that those who visit them will stay to become conforming members. Messianic Jewish congregations are quite different. Yes, our congregations do need a core of like-minded and similarly-called members in order to maintain our Jewish culture and Messianic Jewish vision. But the core membership of a Messianic Jewish congregation rarely (if ever) consists of only Jews. By God's design, almost all of our congregations include committed Gentiles whom we call *K'rovei Yisrael*—Gentiles who are so integrated into Jewish community and Jewish life, that they are virtually indistinguishable from their Jewish counterparts. We consider it a valuable biblical witness that God has brought together, in a single faith community, Jews and Gentiles joined by their common belief in Yeshua and committed to Jewish calling and values. Speaking to the Gentiles, Paul explains an aspect of this in Ephesians 2:13-15:

*“But now in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace...”*

So, in a Messianic Jewish congregation, by God's design, even the core membership is heterogeneous because it consists of both Jews and Gentiles. What's more, the differences among members widens as one moves away from the core to other participants who are not necessarily committed to Messianic Judaism for life, but have, nevertheless, come to us for valid reasons. One common valid reason is a person becoming aware that the church he or she previously attended taught wrong theology about the *Torah*, the Land of Israel, the Sabbath, and the Jewish people, and he or she thirsts to be taught what is biblically true. Such a Gentile believer should be applauded and received by us, even though he or she may not ultimately be called to live a Jewish life, or to have a completely Messianic Jewish vision. He or she may remain with us for a season, and then return to the Christian world to share what he or she learned while with us. Others may remain with us because there is no other suitable place for them to go, and a small number may be called by God to join our core membership as *K'rovei Yisrael*, and develop in discipleship to become *chavurah* leaders, *shamashim*, and even elders alongside their Jewish brethren. So, for us there is value in both homogeneity and heterogeneity—a core of members who are similar in being called to Messianic Jewish life and vision, and others who may not be so called, but find that being among us is valuable and pleasurable.

Despite its value, the dissimilarity of our congregants can sometimes generate problems that have to be addressed. I cannot mention them all within the time I have for this message, but here are a few that you will probably recognize:

- Members disagreeing over what ought to be our expression of Jewish life and practice vis-à-vis the surrounding Jewish community.
- Members disagreeing over the congregation's traditional role of women.

- Members criticizing members (and even non-members) for not living in accordance with what they deem authentic and proper Jewish observance.
- Members arguing over whether, and to what degree, there should be distinctions made in the congregation between Jews and Gentiles.
- Members disagreeing over how the Holy Spirit should manifest in our services.
- Gentiles being unsure of the role that God has for them within the Messianic Jewish Movement.
- Non-core members and even non-members attempting to influence the congregation in ways that are counterproductive.
- Members debating over what things ought to be governed by the community, versus what ought to be left to the discretion of each member.

Faith communities that are intentionally homogeneous in their membership and standards rarely encounter issues such as these because visitors to those congregations who do not want to conform simply do not stay. I mentioned previously that conservative Mennonite churches are among such communities, but so are Orthodox and Ultra-orthodox Jewish congregations. Messianic Jewish congregations are different, however, in that we are conscious of our Jewish calling to be a nation of priests, and that requires that we be diverse so we can minister to a diverse world; we read of this calling in [Exodus 19:5-6](#), and of God’s promise to Abraham that precedes it in [Genesis 22:18](#) and [Galatians 3:8](#):

*Exodus 19:5-6: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”*

*Genesis 22:18: “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (See also, [Galatians 3:8](#)).*

By the time the Covenant was given at Mt. Sinai, the Jewish community under Moses’ leadership was already diverse, for we read in [Deuteronomy 29:9\(10\)-12\(13\)](#):

*All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water—that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

Where did these strangers come from? They were among the mixed multitude who crossed the Red Sea in the exodus from Egypt.

*Exodus 12:37-38: “Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock.”*

Some of us who came from communities where a high level of conformity was required may experience difficulty adjusting to what sometimes appears to be laxness in our defining and enforcing standards for our corporate events and the lives of our members. For example:

- Some of us are unwilling to strike a match on the Sabbath, while others have no problem lighting a gas stove to cook a meal.
- Some of us will not eat in restaurants on the Sabbath, while others of us will.
- Some of us comply with *Torah* by wearing fringes on our garments with strands of blue, while others of us leave off the blue thread and still others of us do not wear fringes at all.
- Some of us cover our heads during prayer, and some of us do not.
- Some of us follow rabbinical *kashrut*, while some of us will readily consume dairy and meat in the same meal.

These are but a few of the non-conformities and inconsistencies we commonly encounter that, if we are not careful, might cause us to become judgmental of our neighbor and think of him or her as being in sin or not properly conforming to community norms. Such a reaction on our part might be acceptable in an Orthodox Jewish environment because the Orthodox consciously seek a high degree of community conformity, but it is not appropriate in most Messianic Jewish communities because of what I said earlier—that we accept heterogeneity.

Some of our acceptance of heterogeneity is for practical reasons but there are also some Scriptural reasons, chief among which is that not all Gentiles are covenantally bound to apply the Commandments of *Torah* in exactly the same way as Jews do. The *K'rov Yisrael* Gentiles among us are (with few exceptions) bound in the same way as their Jewish brethren because they have covenanted with God to live in community with Jews (in our case Messianic Jews). Such were the Gentiles who stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai along with Moses and the Israelites.

Another reason for there being diversity in our congregations is that there is diversity in the way that each of us applies the Commandments of *Torah*. The Commandments were given thousands of years ago, when the *Shechinah* inhabited the Ark of the Tabernacle (and later the Temple), when the Levitical Priesthood was in full operation, and when the government of Israel was, for the most part, responsive to God's direction. None of that is true today. But what is true today is that the Messiah has come, has sacrificed himself for us, has been resurrected, and has sent us the Holy Spirit to direct us individually and corporately in how we should keep God's Commandments. That means that there are bound to be differences in how he leads each one of us, so when we see our brethren respond to the Commandments differently than we, we ought not to automatically assume that they are going their own way and not responding to the Holy Spirit's direction. As for our corporate compliance, that is for the congregation's elders to discern and is one of the reasons that we are exhorted to obey and pray for our leaders:

*Hebrews 13:17: "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."*

1 Timothy 2:1-2: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”

In conclusion, do not expect many rules in a Messianic Jewish congregation, but do expect an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, and that our congregations will adopt norms of Jewish expression and practice to which everyone will be expected to conform at services and other congregational functions. You can expect some inconsistency in these locally established norms because we mix traditions and practices drawn from the various expressions of Judaism and sometimes, even from practices of the Church; the formality with which we take the Lord’s Supper is an example of the latter. There will not be any *kosher police* showing up at your door, but members will be urged to keep their homes suitably Jewish so that congregational members and guests—especially Jewish guests—can visit and feel the comfort of being in “Jewish space.” You can expect that there will be diversity among Messianic Jewish and Gentile members, and variations in their adherence to Jewish and other practices when in the privacy of their homes. You can depend on our congregations’ elders to uphold standards of holiness among the members (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16), but not be intrusive into matters of home life and things that ought to be left to each family’s discretion.

—NKJ

## Defining Our Communal Values

*Delivered May 31, 2007*

Awhile back, Gary K worked with some of our congregations to define and list our core values and goals, but what I have found is that many of us have not carried the process to completion and, as a consequence, many of our members do not have a clear idea of their corporate identity that is rooted in communal values.

The first thing we need to understand is that biblical communal values generally have personal counterparts that can be traced to the commandments of *Torah*. We call them communal values because we exhort our community's members to adopt them, but the common experience is that some do and some do not, and when our members do not adopt our community's values, our leaders, often do not know it..

Now not all values are of equal weight, and when violations come to light, not all demand equal remedies. A member of our congregation who is discovered to be living in adultery and refuses to repent will almost certainly be censured and marked, but a member who eats pork in the privacy of his home is unlikely to receive more than a friendly talking-to by his rabbi and friends.

The *Torah* and other parts of Scripture contain commandments from which our Jewish communal values are derived. A large number of these commandments date back to Moses and were given as part of what the book of Hebrews refers to as the "first covenant." But we are now in the New Covenant that was prophesied by Jeremiah and quoted in Hebrews 8:6-13:

*But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

This is an unpopular passage among many Messianic Jews because, in saying that the Mosaic Covenant is obsolete and in the process of passing away, Hebrews seems to be challenging the very validity of Messianic Judaism defining itself in relation to the *Torah* of the Covenant and *Torah*-derived values. I do not want to side-track from my subject except to point out that it is the Covenant—the way in which man and God relate that has changed—not the *Torah*—for according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

So, God's *Torah* and its derived values are valid in the New Covenant, but we *do* have a problem. It is that much of the *Torah's* literal application was meant for a different time period and under different circumstances—a time when Yeshua had not yet been born and when the Holy Spirit had not yet become available to the common man. As a matter of fact, many of the commandments of *Torah* involve animal sacrifices that require a standing Temple and a functioning Levitical Priesthood, and we have neither. In fact, there is not one biblically prescribed Feast of the Lord that we can keep as commanded—not *Pesach*, not *Yom haBikkurim*, not *Shavuot*, not *Yom T'ruah*, not *Yom Kippur*; and not *Sukkot*. So, what is the answer? The answer is that the Holy Spirit gives us inspiration on how to make valid New Covenant substitutions, and this makes all New Covenant believers (but particularly Messianic Jewish believers) highly reliant on the Holy Spirit for just about everything.

Back to communal values. How do we derive them? By studying *Torah*, the *Nev'im*, the *Ketuvim* and the *Kitvey B'rit Chadashah*, and by opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit for inspired guidance as to what our values ought to be. Now you, as leaders of your respective communities, are responsible for discerning and formulating your community's values and no one can do it for you. Still, I have given this matter some prayerful consideration of my own, and would offer some ideas for you to consider. I am emboldened to present this by some of the teachings I heard over the past few days where Jewish life in the Holy Spirit was raised as an issue, and where I have a particular point of view or perhaps just an alternative way of expressing what has already been said.

A Messianic Jewish congregation's communal values are of two kinds—those that are common to all New Covenant communities and those that are peculiar to Jewish communities. Among these there is another division—values derived directly from Scripture, and values that, while not contrary to Scripture, are derived mainly from Jewish culture and Jewish traditions. While all biblical values are historically Jewish, ever since the formation of the Christian church, many (if not most) are viewed as either generically biblical or Christian. They are values such as love, justice, honesty, mercy, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, hospitality, reconciliation, and others that are attributes of God himself. There are many more in this category, but there are also some that are perceived as particularly Jewish. Consider, for example, the communal value of *dor l'dor*:

*Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger; all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every*

*male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (Genesis 17:3-11 and verse 14).*

The Jewish concept of *dor l’dor* that is derived from these verses of Scripture is a value that is only truly applicable to the Jewish people. It says to the Jew that his or her Jewish identity is not a matter of choice but rather one of inheritance that must be passed on to the next generation; it is a value that promotes the Abrahamic Covenant of circumcision in perpetuity in order that Israel can fulfill its various callings, including being a light to the gentile nations (i.e. the world).

There are other communal values unique to Judaism as well. Zionism, for example, is derived from verse 8 of the Genesis passage I just read and is the call for Jews to return to *Eretz Yisrael* in order to receive their inheritance of the “Promised Land.” And I believe that the Jewish communal value of *Talmud Torah* (Hebrew study of the Scriptures) can be explained by Paul’s rhetorical question and answer in Romans 3:1-2:

*What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*

The oracles of God are the revelations of God preserved in Scripture.

If I have made an adequate case for determining and clarifying our biblical communal values, then permit me to go a step further and reclaim them all as the historically Jewish values that they are. I believe that presenting our congregations’ values as “Jewish” is important because God considers Messianic Jewish congregations to be “Jewish,” and letting our values be seen that way brings the truth of who we are home to the wider Jewish community.

Well, now I have gone and done it! I have admitted that I care what the wider Jewish community thinks of us, and that publicizing our communal values in Jewish terms is a good thing to do. Why do I think this? If it is because I am insecure in my Jewish identity and yearn to be accepted by the Jewish community then I am off base and had better repent. But I am not insecure in my identity, so that is not the reason. My reason is derived by combining two principles I see in Romans 11:16-27:

*For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature*



*into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”*

The first thing that impresses me here is that the cultivated olive tree is owned by its natural branches—all Jews, whether or not any Jewish individual is currently attached to the tree; so the tree is, without doubt, a Jewish tree. But all Jews are not on the tree. Those who, in their blindness, do not recognize Yeshua as Messiah are broken off and are destined to remain off until they came to faith. Messianic Jews reside on the tree, so the tree is not only a Jewish tree, it is a Messianic Jewish tree that hosts formally wild branches (Gentile Christians) and the natural branches of all believing Jews. It is important to remember that we who are Messianic Jews are Jews of the circumcision just like all other Jews and are therefore members of the wider Jewish community by dint of our inheritance. In being our being “born again” we receive a new spirit but, as Jews, we are the same as all other Jews in being carriers and conveyors of the Covenant of Abraham to the next generation.

The second significant thing I notice in the Romans Scripture is that, eventually, “all Israel will be saved. What this means to me is that Messianic Judaism is the Judaism of the future—the one to which all Jews will one day belong, and to which some are ready to belong right now. If that is the case, what we currently call the “wider Jewish community” will one day be the entire Jewish community. It therefore makes good sense to me that we (right now) consider ourselves to be a Jewish community that is part of the wider one and, as such, formulate our communal values so that they will be recognizably Jewish both by the Jews who are already part of us, and those who will join us later. Another way of looking at it is that we ought to build Jewish values into our communities now because they will come in later anyway when the rest of the Jewish community joins us and Messianic Judaism becomes normative Judaism.

The Jewish culture is a rich one and its communal values reflect it. To illustrate, here are some of them:

*Tikkun haOlam*—world restoration  
*Malachah*—hard work and completing tasks  
*S’liychah*—forgiveness  
*Emet*—truthfulness, honesty and propriety  
*Torah*—God’s teaching and law  
*Gimilut chasadim*—acts of lovingkindness  
*Shabbat*—Sabbath rest  
*Moedim*—appointed times  
*Kavod horim umorim*—honoring parents and teachers  
*Rachamim*—mercy and compassion  
*Tzedaka*—Justice, righteousness, charity  
*Shalom*—holistic peace  
*Kashrut*—laws concerning foods and their preparation

*Mitzvot*—the commandments of God

*Mashiach*—Messianic belief (in our case belief in Yeshua)

*Musar*—ethical instruction

*Lashon hara*—evil speech (opposition to)

*Hachnasat orchim*—welcoming strangers

*Eretz Yisrael*—the Land of Israel

These are but a few of the communal values traditionally associated with the Jewish world, and although each one by itself is not unique to Judaism, when operating together, they mark a congregation as Jewish beyond all doubt.

—NKJ

## **First Fruits: The Head and Not the Tail**

*Delivered April 7, 2007*

Sundown marked the end of the Sabbath that fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This makes today the biblical feast of *Bikkurim* or Firstfruits, for we read in Leviticus 23:9-12:

*“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of its firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord.’”*

To be usable, fruit must be harvested, and firstfruits are those that ripen first and are harvested before any other. But fruit referred to in Scripture is not only agricultural produce, for we read in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 about how Yeshua was the firstfruit of the resurrection:

*“But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah’s at His coming.”*

So, although *Yom HaBikkurim* was given by the Mosaic Law as a celebration of the agricultural harvest, we see how God timed Yeshua’s death and resurrection so that he would rise from his tomb on this very day—the firstfruit of many more resurrections to come:

Mark 16:2-6: *“Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Yeshua of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.”*

And in Acts 26:22-23, Paul explained Yeshua being the firstfruit of the resurrection this way:

*“Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Messiah would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”*

There are other fruits and firstfruits mentioned in Scripture as well. For example, Galatians 5:1-26 speaks of “Fruit of the Spirit” which are godly characteristics that the Holy Spirit produces in us. And in Genesis 1:28 we read that God commanded man to “be fruitful and multiply”—“fill the earth

and subdue it.” So, Cain may be thought of as the firstfruit of the union of Adam and Eve, and from him we learn that not all fruit—even firstfruit—is necessarily good fruit.

Now I want to use this occasion of *Bikkurim* to discuss another firstfruit. When God commanded the Israelites to keep *Bikkurim*, He also told them:

*“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.*” (Exodus 19:5-6)

God also told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 28:9:

*“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.*

And in Deuteronomy 28:13 He said:

*“And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them.”*

The fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations began with Israel—the firstfruit of nations whose destiny it was (and continues to be) a kingdom of priests and a servant leader of all the other nations—“the head and not the tail.” Now we know that Israel has substantially rejected the firstfruit of the resurrection who is Yeshua, and so the majority of the Jewish people cannot, as of yet, take the place of their destiny, which is to be the head of nations. Yet Romans 11:5 makes it clear that:

*“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”*

And that remnant is, of course us—the Jewish followers of Yeshua. And since we are the first among our Jewish brethren to embrace Yeshua, we are the firstfruit of the firstfruit, and that means that we Messianic Jews (not the Rabbinical Jewish community) are positionally the head and not the tail of the Jewish people. Although they and we are joined covenantally as fellow Jews through circumcision, Romans 11:25-26 teaches that it is their destiny to join us—not ours to join them. Let us not be smug though, for while the greater Jewish community may currently be disabled from being the head due to its rejection of Yeshua, we who believe in Yeshua can also be disqualified if we do not walk with God in all the ways He requires of us.

Now being the head and not the tail carries with it a responsibility of leadership and humility to remain connected to and conduct ourselves as part of the Jewish people. Furthermore, being the head and not the tail does not mean that we invent a new Judaism or that we do not receive the culture and wisdom of the ages that God has planted within various Jewish communities. What it does mean is

that we must not be mere copiers of conventional Judaism, for we have much to contribute to the rest of the Jewish world that is both good and profitable.

Our main contribution is, of course, being custodians of the truth of Yeshua and of the New Covenant, but we can impact Judaism in other ways as well, and already have. We were among the first Jewish groups to employ modern instruments and celebratory music and dance as part of our services; several traditional synagogues have learned from us and have begun to do similarly. Messianic Jews were wearing *tzitzit* with blue threads long before Orthodox Judaism re-discovered the dye-producing sea creature and re-established the practice. We have been leaders in theological thought, in composing praise and worship music, in helping the Christian Church learn about its Jewish roots, and in offering a viable congregational option for families of mixed marriages. We have also been leaders in restoring the public's recognition of Yeshua being a Jew, in promoting the New Testament as a Jewish book, in emphasizing the importance of the *Ru'ach HaKodesh*, and in receiving Gentiles into our congregations as equal participants.

Messianic Judaism is a firstfruit movement and, as such, has challenged each of our identities at one time or another. Those of us who are Jews continue to be challenged by the Jewish community and certain Christian groups that have found common ground in their belief that a Jew cannot believe in Jesus and remain Jewish. The Gentiles among us are challenged by this assertion as well, since the implication for them is that they have joined themselves to an illegitimate movement. The result for some of us has been that we have developed insecurities about the validity of our professed identities and of the Messianic Jewish movement so, it is no wonder that many of us do not see ourselves as “the head and not the tail.” On the other hand, if we understand and accept that Messianic Judaism is a firstfruit pioneer movement and that we are its first fruit, we will be emboldened to embrace our identities.

Let us think of ourselves as fruit on a tree—let us say a pear tree. Now suppose we ripen and fall to the ground. We look around and see the fruit of other trees laying on the ground nearby—perhaps some apples that have fallen from an apple tree and peaches that have fallen from a peach tree. And, being the firstfruit of our tree, we naturally do not see any pears laying on the ground, so we conclude that we must be either apples or peaches. Logical “yes,” but untrue, and if we expect to taste like either an apple or a peach, we will be disappointed and consider ourselves defective fruit. It is the same for many of us in Messianic Judaism. We are firstfruit and therefore have few role models. Some of us may look to our left, see Rabbinical Judaism, conclude that we must be them, and therefore set ourselves to be like them. Others of us look to our right, see the Christian Church, conclude that we must be them, and set about acting like Christians. And, when we find ourselves within the same Messianic Jewish congregation, our cultures often clash.

But the truth is that neither of these identities is fully ours, for we are firstfruits in God's Messianic plan of redemption, and God expects us to be the head and not the tail. That means “yes,” we adopt certain Jewish ways but not all Jewish ways, and we adopt certain Christian ways but not all Christian ways. Also, as the head and not the tail, God gives us unique Messianic Jewish ways that are neither Jewish nor Christian, and he expects us to lead in those ways as well.

There is always a tension in developing our congregational cultures as to how Jewish we should be. This congregation's vision statement speaks of "providing a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Messiah within the Messianic Jewish community." But we consider ourselves (at least I consider us) to be not only a Messianic Jewish congregation but also a Jewish congregation—a kind of Messianic outpost of Israel in the diaspora, and so we want Jews to feel comfortable here and want to make it their home in Yeshua. We should try to provide that kind of Jewish comfort, but always as the head and not the tail.

—NKJ

## Gentiles in Messianic Judaism

*Delivered January 30, 2016*

A few weeks ago, our *shaliach* Dan Juster visited us and spoke on “Messianic Judaism—Restoring the Book of Acts.” He and I ordinarily see things the same way theologically, and his message was what I expected it would be. A few days later, though, I was surprised to hear that several among us were unsettled by the message because Dan seemed to be speaking to the Jews among us, and not so much to Gentiles. To these hearers, he made it sound as though Messianic Judaism was a religion for Jews who have come to believe in Yeshua, and not a movement of both Jews and Gentiles. The result was that some Gentiles among us that heard Dan’s message felt excluded, like “I thought I belonged here; was I mistaken?”

No, you were not mistaken that you belong here if God brought you here, but you may have been mistaken if you thought that Messianic Judaism is just a Jewish-styled expression of Christianity. Ohev Yisrael’s vision statement on its web site states:

“We are a congregational home for Jewish believers in *Yeshua* and for Gentile believers called to serve *Messiah* alongside their Jewish brethren.”

The statement was worded “alongside their Jewish brethren” intentionally—not to offend, but to make it clear that Ohev Yisrael sees itself as a specialized kind of Jewish congregation—one that is primarily a home for Jewish believers who are joined by Gentiles called to serve Ohev’s covenantal Jewish vision. Not all Gentiles are called to live and serve within a Jewish community but, if you are, this is your home as well.

There have always been Gentiles who have come to Ohev Yisrael for other reasons—legitimate reasons—and who have stayed to become good and valuable members. Perhaps the reason they came was that they discovered that the church should be more Jewish-rooted than it is. Perhaps it was discovering that keeping the Sabbaths is God’s will for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and they could not find a church that would accommodate them (see, [Isaiah 56:1-12](#)). Or perhaps it was discovering that the Land of Israel is important to God, and their church did not see it that way. Or perhaps it was our musical worship or the presence of the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps it was my messages—yes, many Gentiles have come principally to hear my messages <Pause for laughter.> In any case, there may be completely legitimate reasons for a Gentile to attend here (and even become a member) that do not square with Ohev’s stated vision. That’s okay, but he or she should nevertheless keep in mind what the primary purpose of the community is and be willing to serve within its framework.

That notwithstanding, there are those Gentiles among us that have come and stayed because they discovered that their calling by God is to live and serve alongside Jewish believers in Yeshua. Their calling as Gentiles is the same as that of the Jews to which they are joined, which is first and foremost to minister Yeshua to the Jewish people who do not yet know him. Second, it is to assist the larger (Christian) body of believers in regaining its biblical Jewish roots that it lost in history. These committed Gentiles we call by a special name. We call them *k’rovei Yisrael* (or “close family members of Israel). If you are a *k’rov Yisrael* you know it, and you know that your covenant

obligations are the same as those of the Jewish believers you have joined. But if you are not a *k'rov Yisrael*—no worries. Most Gentiles are not, and God will use you here or elsewhere in whatever calling you have.

Since I have said that there are Gentiles who are specially called to live and serve among the Jewish people, perhaps I should justify it with some biblical examples. The first example I would give would be the Gentiles who lived within Abraham's household and were circumcised along with Abraham's family; in Genesis 17:9-14 we read:

*“God said to Avraham, ‘As for you, you are to keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised, including slaves born within your household and those bought from a foreigner not descended from you. The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who will not let himself be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin- that person will be cut off from his people, because he has broken my covenant.’”*

And in verses 26 and 27 we read:

*“Avraham and Yishma'el his son were circumcised on the same day; and all the men in his household, both slaves born in his house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.”*

It seems to me that these Gentiles who lived in Abraham's household and were circumcised along with Abraham's family were the first *k'rovei Yisrael*.

Of course, when Israel went into slavery in Egypt they had no household servants, but *k'rovei Yisrael* surfaced again in the mixed multitude that left Egypt with the Israelites during the great exodus:

Exodus 12:33-38: *“The Egyptians pressed to send the people out of the land quickly, because they said, ‘Otherwise we'll all be dead!’ The people took their dough before it had become leavened and wrapped their kneading bowls in their clothes on their shoulders. The people of Isra'el had done what Moshe had said- they had asked the Egyptians to give them silver and gold jewelry and clothing; and ADONAI had made the Egyptians so favorably disposed toward the people that they had let them have whatever they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. The people of Isra'el traveled from Ra'amses to Sukkot, some six hundred thousand men on foot, not counting children. A mixed crowd [NKJ: mixed multitude] also went up with them, as well as livestock in large numbers, both flocks and herds.”*

The mixed multitude that accompanied the Israelites when they left Egypt were Gentiles of various kinds who had come to know the God of Israel and knew that God was summoning them to make



their lives among the Jewish people. Eventually, the Israelites with their mixed multitude arrived at Mount Sinai from where God spoke his covenant, and we read in Deuteronomy 29:9(10)-12(13):

*“Today you are standing, all of you, before ADONAI your God- your heads, your tribes, your leaders and your officers- all the men of Isra’el, along with your little ones, your wives and your foreigners here with you in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. The purpose is that you should enter into the covenant of ADONAI your God and into his oath which ADONAI your God is making with you today, so that he can establish you today for himself as a people, and so that for you he will be God- as he said to you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Avraham, Yitz’chak and Ya’akov.”*

Notice that they were not only Israelites who gathered at Mount Sinai to hear and receive God’s covenant, but also the foreigners who were the *k’rovei Yisrael* that had followed the Israelites out of Egypt. Notice also, that God specifically recognized their presence and, soon thereafter, gave the following command:

Exodus 12:43b-49” *“This is the regulation for the Pesach lamb: no foreigner is to eat it. But if anyone has a slave he bought for money, when you have circumcised him, he may eat it. Neither a traveler nor a hired servant may eat it. It is to be eaten in one house. You are not to take any of the meat outside the house, and you are not to break any of its bones. The whole community of Isra’el is to keep it. If a foreigner staying with you wants to observe ADONAI’s Pesach, all his males must be circumcised. Then he may take part and observe it; he will be like a citizen of the land. But no uncircumcised person is to eat it. The same teaching is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you.”*

And also in Numbers 15:14-16:

*“If a foreigner stays with you- or whoever may be with you, through all your generations- and he wants to bring an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for ADONAI, he is to do the same as you. For this community there will be the same law for you as for the foreigner living with you; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations; the foreigner is to be treated the same way before ADONAI as yourselves. The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you.”*

These are very significant passages of Scripture because they define this category of Gentiles who live with Israelites (that today we call *k’rovei Yisrael*) as having drawn so close to the Jewish people as to be considered close family members and subject to the same *Torah* and standard of judgment as apply to Jews.

Having said it as I have, I want to be quick to say that this is not the same as what has come to be known as the “one law movement” to which Messianic Judaism does not ascribe. The “one law movement” takes the same Scriptures that I cited (and, in fact, the entire *Torah*) and makes them applicable to all Gentiles whether or not they are *k’rovei Yisrael*. That is a serious misunderstanding and an affront to God’s faithfulness, because it denies his promise to the Jewish people recorded in Exodus 19:3-6:

*“Moshe went up to God, and ADONAI called to him from the mountain: ‘Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya’akov, to tell the people of Isra’el: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”*”

And why are we so sure that God has not broadened his special promise made to Israel to all believers in Yeshua? The apostle Paul answers the question concisely in Romans 11:28-29 where He speaks to Gentile believers and tells them:

*“With respect to the Good News they [meaning the Jews] are hated for your sake. But with respect to being chosen they are loved for the Patriarchs’ sake, for God’s free gifts and his calling are irrevocable.”*

So, you may ask: “If Jews and *k’rovei Yisrael* are held to the same Law and have the same covenant obligations, is there any remaining difference?” Again, we turn to Paul for an answer (at least in part) where, in Romans 3:1 he first asks rhetorically:

*“Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised?”*

And he then answers his own question in Romans 3:2 by saying:

*“Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.”*

I said “in part” because there is more, and it has to do with the entire subject of grafting that we read about in the Book of Romans where Gentile believers in Yeshua receive their eternal and priestly connection to God—not directly, but through their connection to the olive tree that is Israel. In Romans 11:16-18 we read:

*“Now if the hallah [the bread] offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches [meaning the Jewish branches] were broken off, and you- a wild olive- [meaning a Gentile] were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, then don’t boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you [meaning a Gentile] are not supporting the root [meaning the Jewish people], the root is supporting you.”*

So, there is the main difference between Jews and *k’rov Yisrael* Gentiles; it is a matter of who supports who. If God withdraws his covenant promise to the Jewish people that they are to be priests to the nations of the world, then Gentile believers have nothing to graft into and no way to partake of their New Covenant relationship with God. Why did God choose to bring the Gentiles into relationship with him in this way? I do not know, but He did, so any theology that denies the special calling of the Jewish people threatens everyone’s calling.

Several years ago, I distributed a ten (10) point paper to our Gentile members, to help them explain their participation in Messianic Judaism. It is written as though by a Gentile:

1. I am a Gentile and not a Jew because I am not a proselyte and, so far as I am aware, my physical lineage does not go back to Abraham Isaac and Jacob.
2. I have been born-again through my faith in Yeshua; that means I was given a new spirit and eternal life with God when I confessed my sins and asked Yeshua into my heart. That also means that I have been grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel ([Romans 11:17-19](#)) and have thereby become a citizen of the Common-wealth ([Ephesians 2:11-13](#)).
3. In addition to being born again, I have been called by God, to live out my faith in the same way and in the same congregational community as Jews who believe in Yeshua the same as I do.
4. The Jews in my congregation call themselves Messianic to distinguish themselves from Jews who do not believe in Yeshua, so I also call myself Messianic although I remain a Gentile.
5. Both I and the Jews in my congregation practice a Judaism called “Messianic Judaism.” It is a faith, a form of Jewish practice, and a way of life that looks exclusively to the Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—for final authority on God’s Word, and looks to the Holy Spirit for interpretation, application, and guidance.
6. Both Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles such as I am, consider ourselves members in both the Messianic Jewish community and the universal body of believers in Yeshua.
7. Both I and the Jews in my congregation consider that the commandments that were given to the ancient Israelites under the Mosaic Covenant have application to our community today as well. For that reason, we seek to interpret and apply the Scriptures literally when applicable and as the Holy Spirit directs when not literally applicable.
8. Because my congregation and I practice what we call Messianic Judaism, we call our congregation a Messianic Jewish Congregation. This name reflects our belief in Yeshua as well as our *Torah*-oriented practice that is often (but not always) expressed in similar ways as in non-Messianic Jewish Communities. By “*Torah*-oriented practice,” we mean that we seek the Holy Spirit for understanding how to obey God’s Law in the New Covenant and in our individual and corporate circumstances. We obey *Torah* out of our love for God and Messiah; we do not receive our relationship with God through it.
9. The Jewish practices of my congregation establish its primary culture and lifestyle, but we also incorporate practices that come to us from other traditions. These include contemporary praise and worship with instruments, dance, the bread and wine of Yeshua, speaking and receiving prophetic words, and spontaneous vocalized prayer. Because we do not accept rabbinic authority over us, we consider ourselves free to adopt certain cultural and Rabbinic Jewish practices while not adopting others, as we determine which of these practices are consistent with the Word of God.

10. My congregation's mission is several-fold: First, we are a family of Jews and Gentiles who are committed to be an example of faith in Yeshua and in holy New Covenant Jewish living. Second, we are a community that is dedicated to upholding, strengthening, praying for, discipling, protecting, and providing for each other as each of us has needs and as the Holy Spirit directs. Third, we are a community that seeks to convey our faith and traditions to our children and their children. Fourth, we seek to provide a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Yeshua within our Messianic Jewish community. Fifth, we seek to reach out with the Word of God to all who do not yet know Yeshua—first to the Jew, but also to those of the nations. Sixth and finally, we seek to help the Christian Church understand its connection to Israel and return to its biblical Jewish roots.

—CJB

## The Importance of Education and Classical Literature in Judaism

*Delivered March 18, 2017*

I do not usually begin my messages by quoting from the Internet and especially about Islam, but this statement appears on the website of “My Jewish Learning:”

*“Religiously, Jews were categorized by Islam as “infidels” (Arabic: kuffar). However, like Christians, they qualified as “people of the book,” possessors of a prior revelation from God that was written down.”*

“The book” that is referred to is, of course, the Bible, and Jews (more than any other ethnic group) not only read the Bible, but they are the main players in it, and they study the *Tanakh* (the Old Testament) verse-by-verse as part of traditional Jewish life. Studying the Word of God (the developing *Torah* at the time), became intuitional after the time of Moses, and formal Jewish study ever since has included memorizing and copying the Scriptures. Literacy became a high priority, and those who could read and write were given much respect.

This endearment of education did not arise from out of the blue; it was planted in Scripture by God because He wanted his Jewish people to be learned. The word “education” does not appear in Scripture, but much is said about teaching, learning, and knowledge. Here are some examples from Proverbs:

Proverbs 1:5a: *“Someone who is already wise will hear and learn still more;”*

Proverbs 3:1a: *“My son, don’t forget my teaching,”*

Proverbs 9:9: *“Give to a wise man, and he grows still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will learn still more.”*

Proverbs 18:15: *“The mind of a person with discernment gets knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”*

Proverbs 22:6: *“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

Proverbs 23:12: *“Apply your mind to discipline and your ears to words of knowledge.”*

And this one, Deuteronomy 6:6-7 we all know:

*“These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*

Those are from the *Tanakh*, and there are many others in the *Kitvei B’rit Chadashah* (New Testament); here is a sampling:

Matthew 11:1: “After Yeshua had finished instructing the twelve talmidim, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns nearby.”

John 7:14: “Not until the festival was half over did Yeshua go up to the Temple courts and begin to teach.”

Acts 17:10-11: “But as soon as night fell, the brothers sent Sha’ul and Sila off to Berea. As soon as they arrived, they went to the synagogue. Now the people here were of nobler character than the ones in Thessalonica; they eagerly welcomed the message, checking the Tanakh every day to see if the things Sha’ul was saying were true.”

1 Timothy 3:2: “A congregation leader must be above reproach, he must be faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable and able to teach.”

2 Timothy 3:16a: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, “

Ephesians 4:11: “Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers.”

At some point in early Jewish history, some of those who were “educated” (they were all men in those days), began to earn their living through reading and writing, and these were known as “scribes” or “*soferim*” - a term derived from the Hebrew word “*sefer*,” meaning “book.” To these and to the latter-day scribes—the Masoretes who labored on the Hebrew Bible’s text from the sixth to the tenth century—to them we owe the preservation of the Hebrew text and its pronunciation that has come down to us today. It is because of them that all “Jewish” Bibles contain exactly the same Hebrew words, and why we call these words “the Masoretic text.” So important were the scribes of ancient Judaism, that an entire section of the *Talmud* is named for them—“*Masakhet Soferim*,” or “Tractate of the Scribes.”

Judaism today still has its scribes, and some with advanced Jewish education receive *s’micha* as rabbis. Not all rabbis lead congregations; some sell books, some teach, some circumcise, some oversee matters of *kashrut*, and some even sell insurance. The one thing that is common to all rabbis, however, is that they are educated in Jewish practice, history, prayer, Jewish law, and theology, and it is from this and from the Scriptures that we get Judaism’s emphasis on, and respect for, education. I recall my mother’s two favorite instructions to me; they were: “Eat all of your food because children in Europe are starving,” and the other one: “Study hard and get good marks so that I can be proud of you.” Well, I listened to her on both counts and have become both educated and unhappily large in size.

Originally, education meant “Jewish” education only, but Judaism’s respect for education broadened to all education, and a son’s or a daughter’s professional achievements have become the source of Jewish parental pride (and sometimes of jokes). You have no doubt heard Jewish parents bragging: “my son the lawyer” or “my son the doctor—well, okay so he’s a dentist”). Sadly, I have rarely heard a Jewish mother brag about her “son the honest laborer.”

I hope I have succeeded in showing you that appreciation for education is characteristic of Jewish people, and you can even notice it in our congregation. We have a *Shabbat* school for children, afternoon *Torah* study for adults, a course in Biblical Counseling, a substantial Jewish and

theological library, free online courses in Messianic Judaism and theology, a periodic course in *Alef-Bet* Hebrew, training for *B'nei* and *B'not Mitzvah* (and *HaDerech* for Gentiles), and we provide a multi-week course for those who want to become congregational members. Everywhere you turn in Judaism (including in Messianic Judaism), there is something to study—something to learn.

Jewish education typically begins at home, continues in *cheider* (Hebrew School), and culminates in *Bar Mitzvah* and, more recently, in *Bat Mitzvah* as well. Young Jewish men (and these days also women) who want to study further either enroll in a *Yeshiva* or become the disciple of an individual rabbi. Upon completion, the student may be ordained as a rabbi or a *sofer* (a scribe) solely on the basis of his or her education. A cantor (a *chazzan* or Jewish prayer leader) may attend *Yeshiva* as well, but other institutions for training are more common. Notice that I spoke of students, rabbis, scribes, and cantors, as being both male and female. That is a relatively new phenomenon in certain denominations of Judaism; it is not, however, the case in Orthodox Judaism where its leaders remain entirely male.

If there is one expectation of a traditional rabbi it is to teach, and the kind of teaching that is expected is mostly *Torah* and Talmudic law. Traditional Jewish learning begins at home at age 3 and continues into *cheider* (Hebrew School) at age 5. Teaching may be conducted in Yiddish or some other language, but Hebrew and Aramaic are the main languages taught. First comes the Hebrew alphabet, then reading Hebrew, and when that is accomplished, the study of *Torah* begins. At age 7, the youngster in Orthodox Judaism is introduced to the *Talmud* that consists of the Oral Law (*Mishnah*) that is written in Hebrew, and rabbinical debates and opinions around the *Mishnah* (*Gemara*) that is written mostly in Aramaic—hence the need for Aramaic in traditional Jewish education. All of this culminates in *Bar Mitzvah* for a boy at age 13 (or later), and *Bat Mitzvah* for a girl at age 12 (or later).

The subjects included in traditional Jewish education are (1) the *Tanakh*, but predominantly the *Torah* which is the first five books of the *Tanakh*. Within the *Torah*, there is an emphasis on the last four books because they are the ones that contain the Law that was given to Moses by God and then committed by Moses to writing. Second (2), is the *Mishnah of the Talmud* that is supposedly additional law orally given to Moses that was carried by memory through the centuries and was finally written down by Judah the Prince in the third century. Third (3) is the *Gemara of the Talmud* and although the *Talmud* is of primary importance within the wider Jewish world, it is not considered, by Messianic Jews, to be inspired as is Scripture.

Although it is not Scripture, the *Talmud* is the body of Jewish writings that give rise to most Jewish traditions like wearing head coverings, lighting *Shabbat* candles, blowing the *shofar* at prescribed times, etc. In addition to the Bible, *Talmud* is what forms the basis of what the wider Jewish world considers Jewish law (*halachah*).

What have so far been described, are the key elements of rabbinical literature; but there is more. Another item of classical Jewish study is (4) the *siddur*, the traditional Jewish prayer book. The *siddur* developed over time, with prayers surviving that were found meaningful in the early Jewish communities. There is a common structure to all *siddurim*, but also differences that reflect the various Jewish denominations and expressions. The *siddur* is still in a state of development as changes are made from time to time, and several Messianic Jewish *siddurim* have also been

published. Did I say, “prayer book?” Nothing is that simple in Judaism, so there are *siddurim* for weekdays, *siddurim* for the Sabbath, *machzorim* for the holidays, *hagaddot* for Passover *seders*, and *benchers* for miscellaneous prayers and blessings.

Onward and upward, we come to the *midrashim*. “*Midrash*” is a term for a body of ancient commentaries on the *Tanakh* and the *Mishnah*. The earliest known *midrash* dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, and *Midrash Rabbah* is the best known and most complete compilation of the *midrashim*; it is essentially a commentary on the *Torah* and the *Megillot* (scrolls of Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes). *Midrash Rabbah* is number (5).

The next body of literature that is considered a “must” in Jewish education is that which extracts and compiles Jewish law (*halachah*) from both the *Tanakh* and the *Talmud*. (6) The *Shulchan Aruch* (Set Table) is a multi-volume compilation that is the principle authority of Jewish law today. So large is this work that, in 1804, Shlomo Ganzfried extracted from it and published his (7) *Kitzur Shuchan Aruch* (published as “Code of Jewish Laws”) that is a standard gift given to all Orthodox *B’nei Mitzvah*; I received one from my Hebrew teacher and still have it. But there are other compilations of law as well. The most well-known of these (though not the earliest or the latest) is (8) *Sefer HaMitzvot* (Book of Commandments), a compilation by Maimonides of 613 commandments that he derived almost exclusively from the *Torah*. He followed this up with his enormous work (9) *Mishneh Torah* that includes *Sefer HaMitzvot*, and *Talmudic* law. A difficulty exists with our using the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Mishneh Torah* in that they include laws that are no longer applicable. Yisrael Meir HaKohen (the “*Chafetz Chaiyim*”) sought to correct this, so he wrote (10) *Sefer HaMitzvot HaKatzar* (“Short Book of Commandments”) that only includes those that he deemed applicable in the twentieth century.

Although not yet considered a work of classical Jewish literature, I would be remiss were I not to mention that Dan Juster and I have been collaborating on a book titled (11) *The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective*. Our book purports to list applicable commandments that are derived not only from the *Torah*, but from the entire *Tanakh* and the New Testament as well.

Finally, so much of Jewish studies has to do with Jewish law that I feel I must draw your attention to a relatively new literary movement in Judaism known as (12) “*musar*” meaning “reproof” or “instruction” as the word is used in *Proverbs 1:8*. It was founded by Israel Salanter in 19th-century Lithuania, and deals with Jewish ethics and relationships with the expectation that those who meditate on matters of *musar* will fulfill their ethical and religious obligations as part of their enhanced nature.

I hope that I have made my point of how important education (including classical Jewish education) is and always has been within Judaism and to the Jewish people. Messianic Judaism is no exception and so, years ago, leaders of Beth Messiah congregation in Rockville, Maryland founded Messiah Yeshiva, a school designed to train prospective Messianic Jewish leaders. When the School came under Tikkun International, its name was changed to Messiah Biblical Institute (MBI). Today, new Messianic Jewish schools of higher education have sprung up that I would like to tell you about, but my time is up for delivering this message so it will have to wait.

—CJB



## Keeping Torah in the New Covenant

*Delivered September 20, 2014*

Earlier this month, I received an email from a believer (let us call him Thomas),”who read the introduction to my book “The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective,” and wrote this to me:

*“I do not understand the basis for your argument that there are two types of law—“covenant-dependent,” and “covenant-transcendent.” I understand what you are getting at, and almost agree, but you offer no reasoning for your argument.”*

My statement to which Thomas referred is:

*“There are two categories of statutes commanded by God under the Mosaic Covenant—those whose literal compliance depends upon the Covenant’s continued existence, and those whose literal compliance does not. We shall call the first of these, ‘covenant-dependent,’ and the second of these, ‘covenant-transcendent.’”*

The two terms that Thomas questioned (“covenant-dependent” and “covenant-transcendent”) are expressions that are meant to explain commandments whose literal application and enforcement depend upon whether the Mosaic Covenant is still in effect. [Hebrews 8:13](#) says that it is aging and will soon disappear. I wanted to help Thomas understand, so I wrote back:

*“Commandments that I call “covenant-dependent” are the ones that could be obeyed to the letter of how they were written only so long as the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant continued to exist. The key conditions that have to exist to support covenant-dependent commandments are (1) a standing Jerusalem Temple in which animals are sacrificed, (2) a functioning Levitical Priesthood to conduct the sacrifices, and (3) a government (of Israel) that is led by a man of God’s choosing. The other commandments—those that do not need those conditions—those I call “covenant-transcendent.”*

I gave Thomas examples of both kinds of commandments. For a typical “covenant-dependent” commandment, I offered [Leviticus 7:1-5](#), which reads:

*“This is the law for the guilt offering: it is especially holy. They [meaning the kohanim (the priests) in behalf of individual Israelites] are to slaughter the guilt offering in the place where they slaughter the burnt offering, and its blood is to be splashed against all sides of the altar. He [meaning a priest] is to offer all its fat— the fat tail, the fat covering the inner organs, the two kidneys, the fat on them near the flanks, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. The cohen will make them go up in smoke on the altar as an offering made by fire to ADONAI; it is a guilt offering.”*

It is obvious that we cannot obey this commandment literally today. We have no functioning Levitical priests, nor a functioning Holy Temple or Altar. And even if we had those things, we would not be burning up animals as guilt offerings because Yeshua’s sacrifice has become our guilt

offering. Clearly, this commandment is “covenant-dependent” because it depends on the existence of the Mosaic Covenant.

I then went on to give Thomas examples of commandments that are “covenant-transcendent,” and quoted Exodus 20:12-14:

*“Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which ADONAI your God is giving you. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false evidence against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

This passage of Scripture contains three separate commandments, each of which transcends the Mosaic Covenant because we can obey every one of them today exactly as written. None of them need the Temple or the Levitical Priests or the Altar.

Thomas then came back with an intriguing question; he asked:

*“I don’t see anywhere in Scripture that tells us what is in the New Covenant. What, in your opinion, comprises the New Covenant?”*

I told him that his question was a good one, and I gave him an answer. But why am I telling you all of this? It is because the kind of questions Thomas was asking touches what I believe God wants us all to know about *Torah* in the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is best described prophetically in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34), that I will read to you from the New King James Version because it is expressed there so beautifully; it says:

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (NKJ)*

During Mosaic Covenant times, all of the commandments given to Moses that he passed on to the Israelites were doable in every detail exactly as stated. However, Jeremiah prophetically foresaw a change in covenant where God’s law would continue to exist, but where we would receive and respond to it differently than before.

The prediction in Jeremiah 31:33(34), “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more,” can only be explained by Yeshua’s sacrifice; there is no other event in history that can

explain it. According to Hebrews 9:24-26, Yeshua's sacrifice resulted in so complete an eradication of our sins that, for those who receive him, our "*sins are remembered no more.*" The Hebrews passage that describes this, reads as follows:

*"For the Messiah has entered a Holiest Place which is not man-made and merely a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, in order to appear now on our behalf in the very presence of God. Further, he did not enter heaven to offer himself over and over again, like the cohen hagadol who enters the Holiest Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer death many times- from the founding of the universe on. But as it is, he has appeared once at the end of the ages in order to do away with sin through the sacrifice of himself."*

Also, 1 John 2:2 informs us:

*"Also, he is the kapparah [atonement] for our sins- and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world."*

And Romans 4:24-25 tells us:

*"They were written also for us, who will certainly have our account credited too, because we have trusted in him who raised Yeshua our Lord from the dead- Yeshua, who was delivered over to death because of our offences, and raised to life in order to make us righteous."*

So, I believe that the first New Covenant element that God sent to us was none other than God himself (in the person of Yeshua), and it paved a way for the second—the Holy Spirit—also God himself. We read of this second element in John 16:5-7:

*"But now I am going to the One who sent me. Not one of you is asking me, 'Where are you going?' Instead, because I have said these things to you, you are overcome with grief. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I don't go away, the comforting Counselor will not come to you. However, if I do go, I will send him to you."*

Also, in Acts 2:1-4:

*"The festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh [the Holy Spirit] and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak."*

Now, jumping ahead to Acts 2:14-21 (refers to Joel 3:1(2:28)-5(2:32)):

*"Then Kefa stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice to address them: "You Judeans, and all of you staying here in Yerushalayim! Let me tell you what this means! Listen carefully to me! These people aren't drunk, as you suppose- it's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was*

*spoken about through the prophet Yo'el: 'ADONAI says: "In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out from my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy. I will perform miracles in the sky above and signs on the earth below- blood, fire and thick smoke. The sun will become dark and the moon blood before the great and fearful Day of ADONAI comes. And then, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved."'"*

So, in response to the question, “What comprises the New Covenant?” My answer is that the New Covenant is a new way that God has provided for us to have a relationship with him—a closer relationship—a one-on-one relationship; Hebrews 8:6 explains it this way:

*“But now the work Yeshua has been given to do, is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as Torah on the basis of better promises.”*

What are those better promises? Well, instead of our having to communicate with God by way of consulting with prophets, we can now be cleansed of our sins by Yeshua’s sacrifice and communicate with God directly through the Holy Spirit who, because of the cleansing, is able to reside within us. We are told in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

*“...don't you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach HaKodesh who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; for you were bought at a price. So use your bodies to glorify God.”*

According to Hebrews, the two covenants—the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant are different. In the First Covenant, God spoke commandments to Moses from on high and, through Moses, told the Israelites:

Exodus 19:5-6: *“Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine.”*

In response:

Exodus 19:8: *“All the people [of Israel] answered as one, [and said] ‘Everything ADONAI has said, we will do..’”*

But the Israelites did not do what they promised, and they broke God’s covenant.

In the New Covenant, God does not have different moral expectations of us than in the previous covenant. That notwithstanding, the New Covenant is indeed “new” in the way that God communicates his will to us. In the Mosaic Covenant, God was more distant, and his will was conveyed through his commandments and through the prophets. In the New Covenant, by comparison, God has made himself near to us through the Holy Spirit who lives within us, and He speaks to us individually. In those two ways, the two covenants are indeed different.

God's expectation of us in the way we respond to the two Covenants is different as well. In the Mosaic Covenant, our response was:

*“Everything ADONAI has said, we will do.”*

That is good for us as well but, in the New Covenant, our response should also be:

*“Lord, we now know you intimately because the Holy Spirit lives within each of us, and you speak to each of us as a father speaks to his son. In this new close relationship, we know your desire for us, and we obey you—not because we fear punishment—but because we love you and want to please you.”*

In our seeking to keep God's Commandments, our approach should not be one of “rule-keeping” (as it likely would have been under Moses), but rather one of looking to his Commandments to guide us in knowing his will. The knowledge that is acquired through the Scriptures is interpreted and explained to us by the Holy Spirit, so we can understand God's will for us in each of our special circumstances. Although the statutes of the Mosaic Covenant are no longer enforced in the same way that they were under Moses they are, however, exceedingly useful in helping us to know, understand, and appreciate God's law that has now (as Jeremiah prophesied) been put in our minds and hearts by the Holy Spirit.

One final thought:

“Torah” is too often thought of as consisting merely of the statutes and ordinances. Actually, “Torah” is much broader than that. The literal meaning of “torah” is “God's teaching” and, from a New Covenant perspective, it includes everything in God's written Word (i.e. the entire *Tanach* and New Testament), as well as everything He reveals to us by way of explanation and direction prophetically. A New Covenant believer in Yeshua cannot, therefore, separate the keeping of *Torah* from discerning the will of God through the Holy Spirit.

The “covenant-dependent” and “covenant-transcendent” commandments that I quoted earlier were clear and unambiguous, but that is not always the case. Consider (for example) Exodus 23:19:

*“You are not to boil a young animal in its mother's milk.”*

Also, consider Deuteronomy 6:6 and 6:8:

*“These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart;” ... “Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead.”*

Is the Exodus 23 commandment intended to be taken literally? The rabbis have broadened its meaning to not cooking or eating dairy and meat during the same meal or within hours of each other. I, on the other hand, think it was intended to be literal, in opposition to a perverted heathen practice. How do we decide? We consult the Holy Spirit.

Does the Deuteronomy 6 commandment mean that God wants us to pray while wearing *tefillin* (black boxes housing Scripture) on our arms and foreheads? That is the Orthodox interpretation. I, on the other hand, do not believe that the commandment is intended to be literal, but rather intended as an exhortation for us to think and do according to the Word of God! How do we decide? Once again: We consult the Holy Spirit.

There are many such commandments in the Bible that need interpretation from the Holy Spirit. We could simply adopt whatever practices we find convenient or embrace the practices of one authority or another, but I believe that God wants us to consult him directly. There may, in fact, be different applications according to the communities in which we live, and each of our particular circumstances. We cannot know unless God reveals it to us, and He normally will not reveal it to us unless we ask him.

That is the way I believe God wants us to keep *Torah* in the New Covenant. Relying on the Holy Spirit is the key. We cannot keep *Torah* in the New Covenant by following rules. We need the Holy Spirit for discernment and application.

—CJB

## Knowing Who God Is and Knowing God

*Delivered April 22, 2017*

Today I want to speak to you about knowing God. Related to it is knowing who God is, because you cannot know someone without knowing something about who he is. On the other hand, you can know everything about a person and still not know the person, because knowing someone requires that there be a relationship. Scripture exhorts us to know God, and to have a personal relationship with him:

John 17:3: *“And eternal life is this: to know you, the one true God, and him whom you sent, Yeshua the Messiah.”*

Philippians 3:10-11: *“Yes, I gave it all up in order to know him, that is, to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings as I am being conformed to his death, so that somehow I might arrive at being resurrected from the dead.”*

1John 4:8: *“Those who do not love do not know God; because God is love.”*

Indeed, Scripture tells us that God is our heavenly father, but do we relate to him as a father? A good test is whether we relate to him as we do (or should) to our earthly father. We talk to our earthly father. Do we talk to God? We listen when our earthly father talks back to us. Do we hear and listen to God when He talks to us? Ideally, we love our earthly father (and mother) because they gave birth to us and first loved us. God gave birth to us through his creation and 1 John 4:19 says:

*“We ourselves love now because he loved us first.”*

So, do we love God the way that Scripture says we should? Deuteronomy 6:5 commands us to:

*“...love ADONAI your God with all your heart, all your being and all your resources.*

Do we do that? John 3:16-17 says that:

*“...God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed.”*

Do we love God sacrificially the way that God loved us? In John 14:15 Yeshua said:

*“If you love me, you will keep my commands...”*

Some of us try to love God by keeping his commandments and, if we are reasonably successful at it, we may believe that all is fine in our relationship. Well, that is not what the Scripture says we are to do. Notice that, in John 14:15, loving God comes first and keeping his commandments comes as a result of loving God. If I had written the Scripture, I might have expressed it this way:

*“If you love me, you will WANT to keep my commands...”*

But no one consulted me on how it should have been written, so I will not presume. Anyway, you cannot love God without knowing him, and you cannot know God without knowing who He is, i.e. what He is like. So, I will move on from the subject of knowing God and spend the rest of this message on who God is.

How do we know who a person is? Is it enough to know his name? Suppose I give you a name—“Albert DeSalvo” for example. Do you know him? Well, you know his name, but do you know him well enough to want to be friends with him? I think not, because Albert DeSalvo was the Boston Strangler of the 1960s. So, knowing someone’s name is not enough to say that we know the person. Then what is enough? Well, spending time with a person is a good first step in learning about a person because, over time, we experience the person in different situations, and that helps to give us a depth of understanding of who the person really is. But we are talking about God here, so do we spend enough time with God in order to experience him personally and know what He is like? That is a question that each of us ought to ask ourselves and, if the answer is “no,” then we need to do something about it.

I think it is important to consider how we can spend time with a God that we cannot see. There are two ways. First, we can converse with God. If we are a believer, we know that He hears us when we speak to him, but what is sometimes more challenging is hearing him when He speaks to us. For those of us that would confess that we rarely hear God, or do not hear God at all, I would say that the first step to hearing him is believing that we can. Our ability to know God through conversing with him is a foundational attribute of the New Covenant that we read about in Jeremiah 31:32(33)-33(34):

*“‘For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,’ says ADONAI: ‘I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother [to] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.’”*

You will notice that God says that the New Covenant he will make with the Israelites will result in everyone who is party to the covenant knowing him as Lord, and that He will achieve it by putting the *Torah* within each of them, and by writing it on their hearts. I have no doubt that those who heard Jeremiah prophesy this did not have a clear understanding of how God would achieve it, but we now know that it was achieved (and is achieved) by the Holy Spirit indwelling all believers who receive him. For that reason, knowing God in a personal way must involve the Holy Spirit, for without the Holy Spirit we are out of communication with both Yeshua and the Father—in other words, out of communication with God.

Now God has graciously provided us with help for our getting to know him, and that help is the Bible that tells us about him; keep in mind that knowing God (which is the goal) is different from knowing about him, but knowing about him helps us to know him. Here are two Scriptures that exhort us to attain knowledge about him:

Ephesians 1:16-17: *“I have not stopped giving thanks for you. In my prayers I keep asking the God of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the glorious Father, to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you will have full knowledge of him.”*



*Colossians 1:9-10: "Therefore, from the day we heard of it, we have not stopped praying for you, asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all the wisdom and understanding which the Spirit gives; so that you may live lives worthy of the Lord and entirely pleasing to him, being fruitful in every good work and multiplying in the full knowledge of God."*

The Scriptures I just read exhort us to know who God is, but they do not themselves tell us who He is. Not to worry, because there is a plethora of Scriptures that enumerate God's attributes, the total of which tell us who He is. There are so many Scriptures and so many attributes that all I can do in the time allotted is to list the attributes of God that I have found during a recent search and cite a Scripture that supports each of them. So, let us look at them in alphabetical order; there are a lot of them:

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1. GOD IS A BLESSER OF MEN

Deuteronomy 7:13-14

2. GOD IS A COMFORTER

Isaiah 41:13

3. GOD IS COMPASSIONATE

Psalms 103:13

4. GOD IS A CREATOR

Genesis 1:27

5. GOD IS OUR DELIVERER and SAVIOR

Isaiah 43:11

6. GOD IS AN ENCOURAGER

Joshua 1:9

7. GOD IS ETERNAL

Psalms 93:2

8. GOD IS FAITHFUL

Deuteronomy 7:9

9. GOD IS THE FATHER OF YESHUA

Mark 1:10-11

10. GOD IS OUR FATHER

Matthew 23:9

11. GOD IS FEARSOME

Psalms 111:10

12. GOD IS A FORGIVER OF SIN

Micah 7:18-19

13. GOD IS A GIVER OF GIFTS

James 1:17

14. GOD IS GLORIOUS

Psalms 19:2(1)

15. GOD IS GOD OF ALL

Jeremiah 32:27

16. GOD IS GOOD

Psalms 145:9

17. GOD IS GRACIOUS

Psalms 145:17

18. GOD IS GREAT

Jeremiah 10:6

19. GOD IS OUR HEALER

Psalms 103:2-3

20. GOD IS OUR HELPER and COUNSELOR

Hebrews 13:6

21. GOD IS HOLY

Exodus 15:11

22. GOD IS IMMUTABLE\_(unchangeable)

Numbers 23:19

23. GOD IS INCOMPARABLE

Exodus 15:11

24. GOD IS INVISIBLE

1 John 4:12

25. GOD IS JEALOUS

Nahum 1:2

26. GOD IS A JUDGE

1 Peter 1:17

27. GOD IS JUST

Nehemiah 9:33

28. GOD IS KIND

Titus 3:4-5

29. GOD IS A LAW-GIVER

Isaiah 33:22

30. GOD IS OUR LEADER

Psalms 27:11

31. GOD IS LORD

Isaiah 42:8

32. GOD IS LOVE

1 John 4:8

33. GOD IS LOVING

John 3:16

34. GOD IS MERCIFUL

Psalms 103:8

35. GOD IS NEAR

Deuteronomy 4:7

36. GOD IS OMNIPOTENT (all powerful)

Jeremiah 32:17

37. GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

(present everywhere)

Psalms 139:7-10

38. GOD IS OMNISCIENT

(all knowing, wise and seeing)

Job 11:7-11

39. GOD IS ONE

Deuteronomy 6:4

40. GOD IS ONE WITH YESHUA

John 10:30

41. GOD IS PATIENT

2 Peter 3:15

42. GOD IS PRAISEWORTHY

Jeremiah 20:13

43. GOD IS OUR PROTECTOR

Exodus 14:14

44. GOD IS OUR PROVIDER

Philippians 4:19

45. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS

Psalms 145:17

46. GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT  
and SELF-DEFINING

Revelation 1:8

47. GOD IS SLOW TO ANGER

Psalms 103:8

48. GOD IS SOVEREIGN and KING

Psalms 24:10

49. GOD IS A SPIRIT

John 4:24

50. GOD IS A TEACHER

Isaiah 54:13

51. GOD IS TRANSCENDENT  
(beyond our understanding)

Isaiah 55:8-9

52. GOD IS TRIUNE

(Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

Matthew 28:19

53. GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY

Proverbs 3:5-6

54. GOD IS TRUTHFUL

Psalms 25:5

55. GOD IS VENGEFUL

Nahum 1:2-8

56. GOD IS WISE

Job 12:13

Keep in mind that there are other attributes and many more Scriptures than I had time to share. Also, keep in mind that some of the attributes in the list are attributes that God wants each of us to possess as well and that we can possess if we are serious about modeling ourselves after Yeshua.

—CJB

## **Messianic Judaism and We Who Practice It**

*Delivered October 27, 2007*

Two weeks ago, was Hannah's *Bat Mitzvah*, and there were members of her family and friends here who may not have known about Messianic Judaism before they were invited to come. I can imagine that some of the Jewish guests might have thought:

*"What is this mishegas of a congregation that believes in Jesus and calls itself Jewish? Impossible!"*

And I can imagine that some of the non-Jewish guests might have thought:

*"Hannah told me she is in a Jesus-believing Jewish congregation that has both Jews and non-Jews in it. When I said to her: 'So they're Christians?' She said: 'Well, yes and no.' I'm glad she made this all very clear!"*

Sometimes these questions even perplex our own members because most of us were not brought up in Messianic Judaism; we came from somewhere else and we came with preconceived ideas. I, for example, came from Orthodox Judaism where even today a Jew who believes in Jesus is considered a contradiction in terms and sometimes no longer a Jew. Others of us came from Christian backgrounds and are equally incredulous about how some of us can be Jewish in our religious practice but not be Jews. Because of our preconditioning, these concepts boggle the mind and it does not hurt for even those of us who are veterans in the Messianic Jewish movement to review who we are from time to time. In leading up to what I hope will clarify things, let me introduce you to a few folks:

First slide please!

(A man dressed in Christian clerical garb)

Meet the Right Reverend Michael Kane. He was born Manny Cohen—a Jew, but if you ask him if he is a Jew he will probably say "no." His reason for denying that he is a "Jew" is that his chosen religion is Episcopal and that he does not practice Judaism.

Next slide please!

(An American Indian Chief)

This is Chief Running Deer. He was born Marvin Zalmann—a Jew. His mother, Sheila Zalmann, a "nice Jewish girl" from Brooklyn, liked to hang out with native Americans. The chief is a Jew by birth, and like Reverend Kane, he is not Jewish in his religious practice and beliefs in that he does not worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Another "Jewish" boy who is not Jewish by belief and practice.

Here is one more. Next slide please!

(A man with a full beard and wearing a *kippah*)

This is Larry Schneider. He who looks like a Jew, talks like a Jew, dresses like a Jew, worships like a Jew, and is Messianic Jewish by belief and practice. So, he must be a Jew—yes? But no, he is not a Jew; he was born in Germany (therefore his name) and, so far as he knows, his ancestry does not trace back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

All of this is pretty complicated, isn't it? So, in the next few minutes, I will attempt to clarify it by giving you a short course in who we are, and where we individually fit into the Messianic Jewish movement. The first thing we must understand is that each of us has two kinds of biblical identities; one of them has to do with our ancestry, and the other with what we believe. First our ancestry! In [Genesis 17:4-10](#), God says to Abraham:

*“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;”*

Later in [Genesis](#) we read that Abraham's descendants to whom the covenant was given extended to his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob. So, the first aspect of our identity—the one of ancestry—has to do simply with whether our lineage goes back to Abraham, through both Isaac and Jacob. If it does, we are a Jew, and if it does not, we are a Gentile, which merely means we are not a Jew.

Now here is something that sometimes escapes us. By God telling Abraham that he would “be a father of many nations” and that nations would come from him, God was mostly referring to those nations that would, in the future, be Gentile. Yes, God would bless the nation of Israel also, but the main calling of Israel was to be a priestly nation to bring God's light to the Gentile nations of the world. And we know today that the greatest of those blessings given to the world through Israel was God's only begotten son, Yeshua our Messiah.

Now it happens that this congregation, like most Messianic Jewish congregations, pays a lot of attention to (and does a lot of talking about) its Jewish identity and, as a result, the Gentiles among us who perhaps should know better, sometimes forget their own special identity both as recipients of blessing and as full partners with the Jewish people in worldwide ministry. Gentiles called to Messianic Judaism are part of both the Messianic Jewish Community and, by extension, part of the wider Jewish Community as well. According to [Romans 11](#), all believers in Yeshua (Jews and non-Jews) are attached to a (proverbial) Jewish-owned Olive tree and thereby have membership in the Commonwealth (national life) of Israel ([Ephesians 2:12](#)). We call most of the non-Jewish ones of these “Christians,” but we do not use the term for those Gentile believers who are specially called to Messianic Judaism. Those have the same calling of covenant and ministry responsibility as their

Jewish brethren, the one exception being that they cannot convey the Abrahamic Covenant to their children through inheritance.

Now let me get back to talking about Jews. It is true that God chose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the Jewish people) to have a very special relationship with him—one of service so that through them the whole world could come to know God and be blessed. But it is also true that throughout recorded history the Jewish people, time and again, did not obey God and therefore did not fulfill the calling of their covenant. Nevertheless, in terms of physical identity, one is a Jew who is born a Jew, and he remains a Jew his entire life provided (assuming he is a male) that sometime during his life he receives the sign of covenant circumcision. Such a person can believe in God, in pagan gods, or in no god at all, yet he is a Jew if he is descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So, this part of our identity that has to do with ancestry is not difficult to understand. Individually we are either Jews or Gentiles but, as equal members of this congregation, we work together to help the Jewish people fulfill their covenant responsibilities to both God and their fellow man.

There is another part of our identity that is independent of whether we are a Jew or a Gentile. It is the part that enables God to forgive our sins, to grant us eternal life, to join us as equal citizens in the Commonwealth of Israel, and to make us joint heirs of his promises. It is the part of our identity that is premised on our faith in Yeshua the Messiah. The first part of our identity about which I spoke is the inherited part by which we are either a Jew or a non-Jew. In this other part of our identity we are either a believer in Yeshua or we are not. Whether we are a Jew or not makes little difference (relatively speaking) because we can serve God fully either way. But whether we are a believer in and follower of Yeshua does make a difference. It is the difference between eternal life and eternal separation from God.

The *Torah* says in [Deuteronomy 30:19](#):

*“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live...”*

And in [John 5:24](#), Yeshua promised:

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”*

Also, in [Acts 4:10-12](#) we read:

*“let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Yeshua of Nazareth, the Messiah, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

Now I am going to say what may seem to be a very hard thing. While we who are Messianic Jews and Gentiles and practice Messianic Judaism are part of Israel and part of the wider Jewish Community, we are not part of the wider religion of Judaism. I am going to say that again in another way so there will be no misunderstanding. Messianic Judaism is not just Judaism with Yeshua tacked on. It is indeed a Judaism (by virtue of it being a religion belonging to the Jews), but it is one with a fundamentally different approach to God than all other Judaisms (and there are several); the reason for this is that the covenant on which Messianic Judaism relies for its relationship with God is different from the covenant relied on by the others.

Going further, let us analyze Romans 7:1-4:

*“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Messiah, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”*

Here, Paul refers to statutes of the Mosaic Law having to do with marriage and remarriage and constructs an analogy to teach an entirely different lesson. He begins by showing us that, by law, a woman is bound to her husband for the duration of the husband’s life; but, if the husband dies, she is released from her former marriage, and is able to enter a new marriage relationship. The analogy is that we were first married to the Covenant of the Law (i.e. we acquired and maintained our relationship with God through obedience to the Mosaic Law. When Messiah came, we “died to the Law,” meaning that the Mosaic Covenant of Law no longer held us as in a marriage, and we switched our “marriage” to Yeshua. Explained another way, before Yeshua came, died, and was resurrected, our covenant relationship with God was through obedience to the Commandments of the Law. Now that Yeshua has come, our relationship with God is through him—not through obeying statutes of Law. This does not release us from our obligation to obey God’s Law or excuse us if we do not. It merely that the Law is no longer the vehicle of our relationship with God; Yeshua is now the vehicle, and our obedience to God’s Law has become the product.

Perhaps now you understand why I said that Messianic Judaism has a fundamentally different approach to God than all other Judaisms. By not recognizing Yeshua and the New Covenant, the other Judaisms are still operating on the assumption that their relationship with and path to God are through the *mitzvot*—the Commandments of the Mosaic Law. We obey the Mosaic Law (literally where possible) as well as other law found in Scripture, as the Holy Spirit of God puts the desire in our minds, writes it on our hearts, and shows us how to accomplish it. We do it, not to gain or enhance our relationship with God, but because we already have a relationship with God through Yeshua.

I ask you, then, which is the true Judaism of God? Ours that receives God’s Messiah, or the other that rejected him and continues to rely upon the Mosaic Law for its relationship? The answer for me is plain—ours is! Notice I did not ask: “Which are the real Jews?” because all who are descended

from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are real Jews. I am speaking now to not only the Jews in our congregation, but also to the Gentiles. Jew and Gentile alike, we are practitioners of Messianic Judaism (the true Judaism) into which all Jews everywhere will one day come. As Paul says in Romans 11:26-27:

*“And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”*

Do not be intimidated by anyone who calls Messianic Judaism inauthentic because we are in the minority among today’s Jews. Do not be intimidated by anyone who calls Messianic Judaism inauthentic because Gentiles practice it as well as Jews. And do not be intimidated by anyone who calls Messianic Judaism inauthentic because we reject the Jewish oral tradition (*Talmud*) as having compulsory authority.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century re-emergence of Messianic Judaism, we who are Jews fumbled when we tried to reconcile our Jewish identity with believing in Yeshua. Now it is the Gentiles among us who are having the greater difficulty so, in the time remaining, I would like to offer the following as a guide for the Messianic Gentiles in our congregation to use in explaining to others their identity and calling as Non-Jews in a Messianic Jewish Congregation:

#### Guide for Messianic Gentiles

1. I am a Gentile and not a Jew because my physical lineage, so far as I am aware, does not go back to Abraham Isaac and Jacob.
2. I have been born-again through my faith in Yeshua; that means I was given a new spirit and eternal life with God when I confessed my sins and made Yeshua the Lord of my life. That also means that I have been grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel (Romans 11:17-19) and have thereby become a citizen of the Common-wealth (Ephesians 2:11-13).
3. In addition to being born again, I have chosen or been called by God, to live out my faith in the same way and in the same congregational community as Jews who believe in Yeshua as do I.
4. The Jews in my congregation call themselves Messianic to distinguish themselves from Jews who do not believe in Yeshua, so I also call myself Messianic although I remain a Gentile.
5. Both Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles such as I am, consider ourselves members of both the Jewish community and of the universal body of believers in Yeshua.
6. Both I and the Jews in my congregation practice a Judaism called “Messianic Judaism.” It is a faith, a form of Jewish practice, and a way of life that looks to the Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—for authority on God’s Word, and that looks to the Holy Spirit for interpretation, application, and guidance.

7. Both I and the Jews in my congregation consider that whatever the Scriptures had to say to the ancient communities of Israel, they are saying to our community today as well, and so we seek to interpret and apply the Scriptures as literally as seems reasonable and as the Holy Spirit directs.

8. Because my congregation and I practice what we call Messianic Judaism, we call our congregation a Messianic Jewish Congregation. This name reflects our belief in Yeshua as well as our *Torah*-oriented practice that is often (but not always) expressed in similar ways as in non-Messianic Jewish Communities. By “*Torah*-oriented practice” we mean that we seek the Holy Spirit for understanding of how to obey God’s Law in the New Covenant and in our individual and corporate circumstances. Our desire to obey *Torah* comes from our love for God and Messiah; we do not consider it the source of our relationship, nor do we seek our relationship through it.

9. The Jewish practices of my congregation comprise its primary culture, but we also incorporate practices that come to us from other traditions—practices such as contemporary praise and worship with instruments, worship in dance, the bread and wine of Yeshua, speaking and receiving prophetic words, and spontaneous vocalized prayer by the worshipers. Because we do not accept outside rabbinic authority over us, we are free to adopt some cultural Jewish practices and not others.

10. My congregation’s mission is several-fold: First, we are a family of Jews and Gentiles who are committed to be an example of faith in Yeshua and in holy New Covenant Jewish living. Second, we are a community that is dedicated to upholding, strengthening, praying for, discipling, protecting, and providing for each other as each of us has needs and as the Holy Spirit directs. Third, we are a community that seeks to pass on our faith and traditions to our children and their children. Fourth, we seek to provide a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Yeshua within our Messianic Jewish community. Fifth, we seek to reach out with the Word of God to all who do not yet know Yeshua—first to the Jew, but also to those of the nations. Sixth, we seek to help the Christian Church understand its connection to Israel and return to its biblical Jewish roots.

The list I have given you is not perfect, and perhaps some of you here today will improve on it. Still, it is a tool that I pray will be useful.

—NKJ



## Our Sephardic Heritage

*Delivered January 2, 2010*

The Jewish cultural expression of our congregation is mainly *Ashkenazi*—that is, culture derived from Jews who lived in the region along the Rhine that is now Germany. *Ashkenazi* is also the predominant culture of American Jewry, but God has blessed this congregation with a goodly number of members from another culture, Hispanic, some who have only recently discovered that they are Jews, and these folks’ historic Jewish culture is not *Ashkenazic*, but *Sephardic*. You do not generally find this kind of discovery (that you are a Jew) among the *Ashkenazim* because their history does not include a period where they hid their Jewish identity for self-preservation, a fact that sadly made it easy for Hitler to target them in the Holocaust. But many of the *Sephardim* of Spain and Portugal did hide their identities, and often so deeply, that even today, some six hundred years later, many Hispanics the world over are only now discovering that they are Jews. Let us backtrack now and get a brief but hopefully clear understanding of a segment of Sephardic Jewish history, and the meaning of several words that we have probably already heard and used.

Jewish history centers, of course, in the Jewish homeland in and around *Yerushelayim*, the former location of the Holy Temple. When the Jews were expelled from there shortly after 70 AD and even before that, they disbursed to many places, tending to move according to where they were more tolerated or, more often, less persecuted. This led to a very complicated pattern of migration. A large number of Jews ended up on the Iberian Peninsula in what is now Spain and Portugal, and a smaller but significant number settled in a region along the Rhine (*Ashkenaz*) River which may broadly be said to be modern Germany. These *Ashkenazim* eventually migrated and populated Eastern Europe so today, *Ashkenazim* are considered Jews whose Jewish cultural expression derives from Eastern Europe, regardless of where they may now live.

The other large group of Jews, the ones who lived on the Iberian Peninsula, we call *Sephardim*, a term derived from “*Sepharad*,” a biblical location. *Sephardic* Jewish cultural expression developed somewhat differently from that of the *Ashkenazim*—particularly in regard to food, *minhagim* (Jewish customs), and language. Both considered Hebrew to be their *Torah* language, but they pronounced Hebrew words somewhat differently. Also, their everyday spoken languages were the languages of their respective countries and, among themselves, they developed two distinctive dialectic languages—*Yiddish* among the *Ashkenazim*, and *Ladino* among the *Sephardim*.

I will come back to Spain and Portugal in a minute, but I first want to explore the term “*Sephardic*” by jumping to modern Israel, where Jews from all over the world reassembled in modern times. By the twentieth century, some of the Jews that had escaped the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions by fleeing to middle Eastern and African countries made *aliyah* to Israel where they became known as *Mizrachi* Jews or *Mizrachim*—Easterners. Although some of their customs and ways had changed from *Sephardic* customs over their years of exile, their customs were still closer to *Sephardic* than to *Ashkenazic* and so, in Israel, “*Sephardi*” has come to be commonly used for any Jew who is not an *Ashkenazi*. Those two terms—“*Ashkenazi*” and “*Sephardi*”—are the ones that are generally used among Jews in the United States.

Now back to Spain. “*In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.*” That was pretty significant for the future of the Americas, but that very year also marked the beginning of one of the darkest periods in Jewish history. Earlier, the Jews had been rescued by the Islamic conquerors of Spain and thrived both intellectually and financially under their Moslem “hosts.” This was called the “Golden Age of Sephardic Judaism,” most associated with the reign of Abd al-Rahman III (882-942). The decline of the “Golden Age” began when Islamic fundamentalists from North Africa came into Spain and took control away from some of the more moderate Moslems. Sound familiar? The fundamentalist Moslems then threatened the Jews with conversion or death. Does it also sound familiar? Anyway, many who were threatened fled elsewhere in Spain, some to Christian-controlled areas, ironically to be given sanctuary for this brief time by the very Christians who had persecuted them earlier. One of the families who fled was the family of Maimonides, one of history’s most prominent Jewish theological writers. Eventually, there was a re-conquest of Spain by the Christians, and although things were fairly good for the Jews for a while, they eventually turned sour and, in 1492, the Jews were ordered to either convert to Christianity or leave Spain. Many Jews migrated from Spain to Portugal until a similar edict was proclaimed in Portugal in 1497.

So, what to do? Some Jews fled to other parts of Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and even to the New World, and some converted to Christianity and stayed. The general term used by Christians for those who converted was “*conversos*,” meaning “converted,” or “*Cristianos nuevos*” meaning “New Christians.” Some of the “*conversos*” did so with permanent intent and were called “*meshumadim*” or “traitors” by the Jews that fled. But there were a significant number of *conversos* who feigned being Christian outwardly while practicing Judaism in their homes secretly. It was known by many Christians that this was happening, but they had difficulty stopping it because they lacked proof. So, they called those who they suspected of subverting their Christian conversion “*Marranos*,” meaning “swine,” after the common practice of Jews being required to prove their Christian conversion by publicly eating pork. “*Marrano*” was not a complimentary term at the time, but it has become a badge of honor for Jews to be called that today. The Jews who left Spain and Portugal rather than convert did not consider the *Marranos* heretics, but only those Jews who converted willfully.

A story is told of a Christian priest being asked one Sabbath how he was so sure that there were *Marranos* in his town. He took the one who asked to the top of his church’s steeple and said: “Look down there. Every house that does not have smoke coming from its chimney today belongs to a *Marrano*.”

Of the Sephardic Jews who made it to the Americas, some managed to practice Judaism openly, but the Spanish Inquisition followed them to the Spanish colonies and they found that they had to hide their Jewish identity and practices in the New World as well. Those who continued to practice Judaism in secret became known as “Crypto-Jews” or “secret Jews,” and many Hispanics today are discovering their Crypto-Jewish roots in Southwest United States, Mexico, and other places in Latin America.

There is a tendency for us—not only us, but many Jews in the United States—to be narrowly provincial in our concept of what constitutes Jewishness, because most of us who are Jews in this country come from an *Ashkenazi* background that is characterized by *Yiddishkeit*. But Judaism is

worldwide and quite diverse, and while the *Ashkenazim* are solidly in the majority here, more and more *Sephardim* are surfacing—especially from the Spanish-speaking countries in this hemisphere.

Now all this is very exciting—especially for those among us who discover Jewish family roots or even an unbroken chain of Jewish identity. But there is also a caution that I must give you about this, and that is to not allow slight evidence combined with enthusiasm to cause you to claim that you are Jewish if the evidence does not fully support it. A good reason for not doing so is that God needs committed Messianic Gentiles—*K'rovei Yisrael*—as much as He needs Messianic Jews. If you claim a new Jewish identity, you are giving up another identity that is also valuable.

While most of our worship liturgy in this congregation is *Ashkenazi*, there are two distinctly *Sephardic* inclusions. First, we use the *Sephardic Kaddish* prayer because it has a Messianic reference that is lacking in the *Ashkenazi* version. Second, we pronounce Hebrew the way the Sephardim do—not the way *Ashkenazim* do. For example, we say “*Shabbat*,” not “*Shabbaus*,” and we say “*Adonai*,” not “*Adonoi*.” We are indeed a unique Jewish congregation in that way, and I think God would have us continue to learn and perhaps, on occasion, to adopt some Sephardic *minhagim* or customs as a supplement to our mainly *Ashkenazi* practices.

—NKJ

## The Torah of Messianic Judaism

*Delivered May 27, 2017*

For some time, I have thought that “Messianic Judaism” is not a good name for our movement because all of Judaism is Messianic; the distinguishing question between us and the others has been: “Who is the real Messiah?” Judaism’s history has produced a number of false Messiah’s that include Simon Bar Kokhba in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Shabbetai Zevi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Menachem Mendel Schneerson of the *Chabad* most recently. But we know that Yeshua is the real Messiah, so perhaps “Yeshuic Judaism” or even “New Covenant Judaism” would have been better terms for us but alas, we are stuck with “Messianic Judaism.”

More important than what we are called is what we believe as distinguished from other Judaisms. The most common differences spoken of are that we believe in Yeshua, and the other Judaisms do not. Also, we believe that the New Testament is Scripture, and the other Judaisms do not. Also, we believe we are in a New Covenant, and the other Judaisms do not. We also believe that the *Ru’ach Hakodesh* (the Holy Spirit) is active in our lives today, and the other Judaisms do not. Finally, most of the other Judaisms believe that God gave Moses an Oral *Torah* (known today as the *Mishnah*), and Messianic Judaism does not. Well, those are a lot of differences, but there is even one more that is related to the New Testament, and that is what we “Messianics” consider *Torah* (i.e. the teaching or law of God), and how we handle Mosaic *Torah* that was given to us ages ago.

This latter matter of the *Torah* or law of God is also one of the things that distinguishes Messianic Judaism from most of modern Christianity. A key Scripture (often wrongly understood) that defines today’s Christianity, is [Romans 6:14](#) which (rendered in the New King James and similar translations) reads:

*“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*

And here are a few other Scriptures that are similarly misunderstood (also in the New King James):

[Romans 7:6](#): *“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

[Galatians 2:19](#): *“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.”*

[Galatians 3:10a](#) *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse;...”*

So now that I may have turned you away from Messianic Judaism by showing you these Scriptures, let us see if I can rehabilitate you. How do I know that these passages of Scripture have been misinterpreted? It is because Yeshua himself exhorts us to keep the Law of God—the *Torah*:

[Matthew 5:17-19](#): *“Don’t think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be*

*called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” (CJB)*

Matthew 23:23: *“Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P’rushim [Pharisees]! You pay your tithes of mint, dill and cumin; but you have neglected the weightier matters of the Torah—justice, mercy, trust. These are the things you should have attended to—without neglecting the others!” (CJB)*

And Yeshua told this parable after “A man approached him and said, “Rabbi, what good thing should I do in order to have eternal life? Yeshua said to him in Matthew 19:16:

*““Why are you asking me about good? There is One who is good! But if you want to obtain eternal life, observe the mitzvot [i.e. the commandments of Torah.]” The man asked him, “Which ones?” and Yeshua said, “Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t give false testimony, honor father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself.”” (CJB)*

Why then do Yeshua’s words appear to contradict Paul’s words? Paul seems to be saying that we are no longer under the *Torah*, and Yeshua seems to be saying that obedience to the *Torah* is a component of our salvation. The answer is that I have switched translations on you—from the New King James Version to the Complete Jewish Bible.

Whereas the New King James translates Romans 6:14:

*“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*

The Complete Jewish Bible translates Romans 6:14:

*“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under legalism but under grace.”*

Stern’s CJB translation of νόμον (*nomon*) as “legalism” rather than “law” is not accidental, nor is it inappropriately self-serving. It recognizes a frequent misuse of another Greek word in the verse, which is ὑπο (*hupo*) that is commonly translated “under.” The English word “under” is peculiar in that it has two meanings. One of them, “subject to,” is not the right meaning here because then Romans 6:14 would be saying that we are not subject to God’s law. The right meaning here is “underneath,” so that Romans 6:14 is more correctly translated:

*“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not underneath [the umbrella of] law, but underneath [the umbrella of] grace [for the forgiveness of sin and salvation].”*

In other words, while we are subject to God’s law, our salvation is no longer dependent upon it, which is a good thing because we have never fully complied with God’s law (nor can we ever). Instead, God has graciously provided his son Yeshua, our Messiah, whose sacrifice of himself takes away our sin when we fail to obey God’s law and subsequently repent. Hebrews 9:22 speaks to this as well, when it says:

*“In fact, according to the Torah, almost everything is purified with blood; indeed, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”*

I have had an interest in the commandments of *Torah* in the New Covenant for some time and have, in fact, been writing a book co-authored with our *Shaliach* Dr. Dan Juster, titled: “New Covenant *Torah*: The Law of Messiah Compiled as *Mitzvot*” (*mitzvot* are commandments). I had just finished covering the *mitzvot* listed by Maimonides and was beginning to search for *mitzvot* in the New Testament when I encountered a great surprise. I had long suspected that the New Covenant Scriptures contain law, but what I did not suspect was how much law there actually is. To date I have only gotten through the Book of Matthew and already I have identified eighty-nine commandments stated either explicitly or implicitly. Although I have read through the New Testament several times, it did not hit me that I was reading law, probably because I was not looking for law. For example, Matthew 5:13 states:

*“You are salt for the Land. But if salt becomes tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except being thrown out for people to trample on.”*

What is the difference in meaning between that and the constructed *mitzvah*:

*“We are to be salt for the earth and not lose our saltiness!”*

Or the difference between Matthew 5:22 that states:

*“But I tell you that anyone who nurses anger against his brother will be subject to judgment; that whoever calls his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing!’ will be brought before the Sanhedrin; that whoever says, ‘Fool!’ incurs the penalty of burning in the fire of Gei-Hinnom!”*

and the constructed *mitzvah*:

*“We are not to nurse anger against nor despise our brother!”*

There is no difference, and paraphrasing *Torah* Scripture in these ways is how Maimonides and others compiled their 613 *mitzvot*—by going verse-by-verse, Genesis through Deuteronomy, looking for commandments.

It may astound you that I have found eighty-nine commandments (both explicit and implicit) in the Book of Matthew—a book of the Bible that ostensibly tells us that we are no longer under law. So, I ask you: “Are we who are New Covenant believers no longer subject to God’s law and are therefore given a free pass to heaven?” Jeremiah prophesied:

*“Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI. “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says*

*ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Jeremiah 31:30(31)-32(33)).*

The New Covenant law referred to by Jeremiah consists of every word in the Bible that instructs us and that is applicable to us. That notwithstanding, we understand that some commandments are applicable to Jews and not to Gentiles, some only to women and not to men, some only to parents and not to children, and some are not literally applicable to anyone today because today we have no working Levitical priesthood, and no Temple in which we are able to conduct animal sacrifices.

To summarize, the purpose of this message has been two-fold—(1) to put the lie to a prevalent Christian assertion that obedience to God’s law (*Torah*) is not authorized for today’s believers in Yeshua, and (2) to highlight the New Covenant distinctive of Messianic Judaism that it is still (as stated in Romans 3:2) entrusted for preserving and disseminating the “very words of God.”

—CJB





# **C. Messianic Jewish Life**

## **Sermons • Vol 1**



## As You Go

*Delivered December 9, 2017*

I'm Reading from Matthew 10:5-7:

*“These twelve Yeshua sent out with the following instructions: ‘Don’t go into the territory of the Goyim [Gentiles], and don’t enter any town in Shomron, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Isra’el. **AS YOU GO**, proclaim, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is near,’...”*

Later, Yeshua sent out his disciples (all Jewish men) with an expanded commission, and he talked with them and said (and I quote from Matthew 28:18b-20a):

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim [disciples], immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh [Holy Spirit], and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”*

Those first disciples of Yeshua multiplied to become hundreds, thousands, and millions, and we today are among them, carrying the same covenant obligation as the first twelve, to go out and make disciples of all peoples. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, expressed it this way:

*“For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God’s powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile.”*  
(Romans 1:16).

All Messianic Jewish congregations have had their strengths and weaknesses and ups and downs over the years, but their history has overall been one of consistent forward progress leading us to where we are today at the threshold of a great new chapter of increased emphasis on evangelism, service outreach, and intercessory prayer. How do I know that? I believe I received it from the Holy Spirit and that circumstances confirms it.

All of this is too much to tackle in this one message, so I will confine myself today to what I believe is one of our critical needs, which is for us to more fully embrace bringing the Word of God and the Good News of Yeshua to our Jewish brothers and to others whom God brings across our paths. Yeshua’s directions to his disciples to reach out beyond their communities were not the first that were given. God’s words in Exodus 19:5-6 have required it from us from the time of Moses, as we read:

*“Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [i.e. priests] for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”*

And years later, in chapter 61, verse 6a, the prophet Isaiah said of the Jews who were coming out of captivity:

*“...but you will be called cohanim [priests] of ADONAI [the Lord], spoken of as ministers to our God.”*

Although the word “outreach” is not used in any of these Scriptures, the word “go” in Matthew and the word “priests” in Isaiah, make it clear that outreach to communities and individuals outside of our own is what God intends and has always intended.

Make no mistake. Our congregation has engaged in evangelism and outreaches of a variety of kinds throughout its existence. Nevertheless, as often happens with congregations, ours has acquiesced to the comfort of serving mostly within its own membership and has become lethargic in reaching the outside world both institutionally and personally. We have lost our sense of salvation urgency, and have become so consumed with family matters, work matters, and school matters, that we have left little priority time for reaching the lost of our fallen world. Naturally, there are those among us who are exceptions to what I have said, some who do prioritize their time for outreach. If you are one of these, you should know that God is pleased with you and wants to use you to energize and challenge the rest of us. If you want to know which of these you are, ask yourself: “In what outreach activity am I currently involved?” “When was the last time I spoke to someone about Yeshua outside of my congregation and my immediate family?” I think you will get the point.

Adjusting priorities of how we spend our time is not easy for most of us for, if it were, we would probably already have done it. The truth is, if we are not convicted by God that changing our priorities regarding outreach is necessary, we are not likely to do it merely on the strength of hearing this message. I beseech all of us, therefore, to take the matter of priorities to prayer, ask God whether what I have said is true and, if it is, ask God what He would have us do about it.

Establishing congregational outreach programs are the responsibility of our elders, so I will not dwell on those here other than to point out that organized outreaches can take many forms. I recall door-to-door visiting, handing out salvation tracts on street corners, organizing debates between rabbis, singing in parks, driving through neighborhoods with sound systems blaring, and praying at designated locations in the District of Columbia. Yes, praying for others is a form of outreach.

Permit me to share one outreach event that I would not recommend, and that I would rather not repeat. A group of us were invited by the New York chapter of “Jews for Jesus” to join them in street ministry at the entrances of Macy’s department store, and then to sleep overnight in their Manhattan office (on the floors I might add). It was Friday. We drove to New York, handed out tracts until late afternoon, and were going to return to the J-for-J office for the night, when one of the J-for-J leaders asked if we would like to experience visiting a conservative synagogue for its *Erev Shabbat* service. We said we would, so he guided us there and, not wanting to be a distraction (after all, we were a group of ten or so), we made our way to the synagogue’s balcony. Now among our group was a young man that was somewhat clumsy, and in Jewish terms would rightly be referred to as a *schlemiel*. Well, he was sitting in the front row of the balcony and decided to get a better look at what was going on below, so he propped his knapsack containing left-over “Jews for Jesus” tracts on the balcony railing, leaned over, lost control of his knapsack, and hundreds of “Jews for Jesus” tracts floated to the sanctuary floor below. Needless to say, we denied knowing him and quickly left by the nearest exit.

Now back to serious. What I have so far described has been organized congregational outreach for which the elders are responsible. But what I want to speak to you about mainly is our personal responsibility for outreach. The title of this message is “As You Go,” which is taken from Matthew 10:7:

*“As you go, proclaim, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is near’ ...”*

It was said by Yeshua to his disciples when he sent them out to minister the Kingdom of God to their Jewish brethren. Although they were sent out with purposeful guidance, their outreach commission was given to them individually; it was not an organized congregational activity. The disciples did not know who or what they would encounter in their respective journeys, and their only instruction was to “go,” heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those afflicted with leprosy, and expel demons. Clearly, they could not do these things in their own power, so Yeshua sent them out with Holy Spirit power even before the Holy Spirit made himself available to all later on that famous *Shavu’ot* that Christians call “Pentecost.”

The point of my telling you this is that we are Yeshua’s present day disciples, and we have the advantage of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) dwelling within us. We have inherited the same mission of outreach as Yeshua’s first disciples—first to the Jew and also to the Gentile—and we have every reason to believe that, because of the Holy Spirit within us, we have the same power and spiritual authority as they, and possibly more.

I noticed, over the years, that whenever I exhorted believers to outreach, I received resistance that was mainly due to fear. Fear of speaking to strangers, fear of not knowing enough of what the Scriptures say, fear of being persecuted (e.g. by friends and co-workers), and fear of being rejected. I am certain that right here in this room some of you who are listening to this message are experiencing such fears as you contemplate changing your sedentary and private ways to launch into a lifestyle of reaching out.

The antidote for fear is faith, but “*let not your heart be troubled,*” for there are many ways to do outreach, and there is something suitable for everyone. But before I get into those, I urge you to consider the foundational words in Matthew 10:7, “As you go!” I am sure that God is pleased when we participate in organized outreach events, but mainly He wants us all to reach out to persons we encounter “as we go” through a typical day. It is the rare individual whose typical day is spent all day at home and encountering no one from the outside. And even if that is the case, computers nowadays allow us to communicate outside of our homes virtually all over the world. But most of us do encounter people outside of our families almost every day—at work, at school, at stores, in restaurants, and in so many other places. What we need is to develop a consciousness of whether the Lord has brought individuals we encounter across our paths for a purpose. We can know it prophetically or we can assume it and let some words slip from our mouths to see if they take hold and start a conversation. If launching into an evangelistic exhortation is scary to you, consider that that is not the only way. Something as small as saying “Have a blessed day” to a store checkout clerk can lead to a short conversation and, even if it does not your remark will not be forgotten so, when you encounter the clerk again, he or she will remember you and a relationship may gradually develop.

There are essentially three ways to be a witness for God; they are (1) by speaking; (2) by serving; and (3) by modeling. One of the best ways to initiate a conversation that can lead to sharing is to ask a person about himself: “What has your day been like?” “Do you have children?” “What do you do for fun when you’re not working?” Benign questions like those generally result in an answer that gives you a small window into a person’s life that can be followed up on. Suppose you have encountered a person to which you have asked such a question, and he lets a remark slip from his mouth such as “I’m exhausted and really need to be in bed.” You could respond with “I am familiar with those kinds of days and, when they occur, I find that prayer helps. Would you like me to say a short prayer for you?”

I want to tell you of an encounter that I had just this past week. Marie and I called for an electrician to service a 220-volt power line for our air conditioner. A young man from the electric company responded and fixed the problem and, as he was leaving, it occurred to me to engage him in conversation. I asked him if he was married, and he said that he was separated. I offered condolences and asked him if there was any hope of a reconciliation. He said there was none. I then asked him if he had any children, and he said that he had a 5-year-old son and that he was devoting his life and virtually all his time outside of work to his son’s upbringing. I asked him if he was a Christian; he said he was but that he was not going to church. I told him that I am a Messianic Jewish Rabbi, which means that I and others like me believe in Jesus. He seemed surprised and said that he did not know that any Jewish people believed in Jesus. At that point, I felt that I had license to offer him some personal advice. I asked him if his estranged wife would object to his bringing his son to church and, when he said “no,” I told him how important it was for him and his son to partake of spiritual life together in a good church, and that the Bible taught that believers should not fail to assemble with one another and be discipled. I suggested that it would cement his relationship with his son more surely than anything else. He seemed to listen carefully to what I advised, so I gave him my phone number and invited him to call me if he wanted to talk some more. I do not know if he will call, but I know that I planted a seed that he will consider.

That example and the previous ones involve our speaking to others, so let me now say a few words about outreach by serving. Our neighborhoods, towns and cities, no matter how perfect-looking on the surface, have people within them who are in need and are suffering in various ways. Even the most prosperous communities have hungry and homeless people, people who have encountered tragedies, and people who are sick, old, and disabled. These are needs with which some of us can assist by volunteering our service. We can serve food in soup kitchens, man homeless shelters, visit old age and convalescent homes, and volunteer in hospitals. How, you might ask, are such acts of service connected to sharing the Gospel? They are connected in that your Messianic Jewish or Christian faith will become known even if you remain silent, and your voluntary acts of mercy will become associated with Messiah. Your witness will be your acts of service that can speak as loudly as words.

I recall an event that illustrates this. There was a time of unrest during the Vietnam war when anti-war demonstrators in the District of Columbia tore up all the wooden benches that circled the Washington Monument. It was reported in the newspapers, and one morning a few days later the benches were found “miraculously” restored. What had happened was that Mennonites from Pennsylvania heard about the destruction and, without asking anyone’s permission, organized a crew

of skilled men with trucks, tools, and wood, came to Washington in the middle of the night, re-built the benches, and returned home as silently as they had come. Do you not think that that gesture of service and benevolence had its effect in witnessing about Messiah? It surely did, and tears come to my eyes even now when I think of it.

Finally, let me say a few words about outreach by modeling. Modeling what? Modeling the life of a believer. As a believer, you do your best to lead a holy and *Torah*-obedient life, and that becomes your silent witness. One thing, however; in order for it to be a witness, someone has to witness your witness. What I mean by that is that God wants you to be among people and in places where you and your way of living can be seen; Matthew 5:14-16 instructs us this way; it says:

*“You are light for the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Likewise, when people light a lamp, they don’t cover it with a bowl but put it on a lampstand, so that it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.”*

You may have heard the saying: “We are to be in the world but not of the world.” The saying comes from John 17:9-18 which is so very important because we cannot outreach in any way, even as a silent witness, if we do not allow ourselves—in fact cause ourselves—to be in the world. Yeshua emphasizes this as he prays for his disciples whom he is about to leave as he returns to heaven to be with his Father; he says to his Father:

*“I am praying for them [meaning his disciples]. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given to me, because they are yours. Indeed, all I have is yours, and all you have is mine, and in them I have been glorified. Now I am no longer in the world. They are in the world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, guard them by the power of your name, which you have given to me, so that they may be one, just as we are. When I was with them, I guarded them by the power of your name, which you have given to me; yes, I kept watch over them; and not one of them was destroyed (except the one meant for destruction, so that the Tanakh might be fulfilled). But now, I am coming to you; and I say these things while I am still in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world—just as I myself do not belong to the world. I don’t ask you to take them out of the world, but to protect them from the Evil One. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Set them apart for holiness by means of the truth—your word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”*  
(see also, 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16)

Thank you, Lord, for giving me this message. If there are any here who want prayer for re-prioritizing their lives or for Holy Spirit boldness to encounter and converse with strangers, please come up at the end of the service.

—CJB

## Bar Mitzvah and the Torah

*Delivered December 1, 2007 on the Occasion of Joshua's Bar Mitzvah*

Joshua, in common parlance, we say that today is your Bar Mitzvah. That is not totally accurate; what is accurate is to say that today YOU are a Bar Mitzvah—a son of commandment.

Now most people understand this as a day when the Jewish community and your congregation consider you to be no longer a boy, but a man—a man who is responsible to God and to his community for obeying the commandments of the *Torah*. That is primarily where we get the term “son of commandment.” Well, all of that is correct but it is not all there is to it because, in Romans 3:2, the *shaliach* Paul might as well be speaking to you directly, saying:

*“Joshua, since you are a Jew, to you were committed the oracles of God.”*

What are these “oracles of God?” In Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary of 1913, we find among others, this definition of “oracles”:

“The communications, revelations, or messages delivered by God to the prophets; also, the entire sacred Scriptures—usually in the plural.”

So, to you, Joshua, has been entrusted the whole counsel of God, from the words of the prophets, to the Commandments of the *Torah*. The word *Torah* means “God’s teachings,” and so *Torah* encompasses all of it.

What this means is that for you, Joshua, obedience to *Torah* is only the beginning of what God wants from you. God wants you take custody of his *Torah*, protect it, and teach it to others! God is saying: “Joshua, I am giving you joint ownership of my *Torah* along with the rest of the Jewish people! Keep it safe, guard it against misuse, and be a light to the world by making sure that its truths are proclaimed to everyone who will receive them. In 1 Peter 4:11 we read:

*“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Messiah Yeshua, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.”*

To even begin doing that, Joshua, you must, yourself, be living *Torah*. To proclaim *Torah* to others without living it yourself would be hypocrisy. It would be quickly detected, and your witness would be rejected. Now to live *Torah* you must know what is contained in *Torah*, and that means studying beyond the study you have done up to this point. The Apostle Paul was critical of those who came to the age of *Bar Mitzvah* and stopped pursuing biblical understanding, for in Hebrews 5:12 we read:

*“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”*

So Joshua, think of your learning up to this point as your time of having received milk, but now it is time to for you to join the world of adults and eat the solid food of advanced understanding that will make you not only a student of *Torah*, but also a teacher—a conveyor of God’s Word to others.



Now after hearing this, your next question must either be: “Where do I get this solid *Torah* food?” or “How do I get un-*Bar Mitzva*’d and get out of here?” Well, since you cannot get un-*Bar Mitzva*’d, I’ll direct myself to the question you no doubt would have asked. You get solid *Torah* food from learning the Scriptures and from consulting the *Ruach HaKodesh*—the Holy Spirit. Understanding and applying the commandments of *Torah* cannot be separated from experiencing and communicating with the Holy Spirit! It is the New Covenant truth prophesied by Jeremiah during the time of the older (Mosaic) Covenant:

Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34): *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

Joshua, you are of the house of Israel, so the New Covenant was made with you! And our Messiah has come, so we are now living in the New Covenant time that was prophesied by Jeremiah. So, let us personalize Jeremiah 31, and take a look at what God is saying to you; He is saying:

*“Joshua, I have put my law in your mind, and have written it on your heart; and I am your God, and you are one of my people. No more must your neighbor teach you (and you your neighbor) how to know me, for you and your neighbor can now both know me directly, through the Holy Spirit, whom I sent to you after Yeshua returned to be at my right hand.”*

At this point you might ask “What has knowing God to do with understanding his commandments? Is it not the reverse? Do we not get to know God *through* understanding his commandments?” Let me answer the second question first. We do get to know about God through knowing and understanding his commandments, but we get to know God personally by conversing with him. We speak to him, and he to us through the Holy Spirit. And as to the first question, knowing God and listening to what he tells us is the key to understanding his commandments and their application in our lives.

Take, for example, Numbers 15:38-41; God instructed Moses:

*“Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.”*

This is the commandment that requires us to wear *tzitzit*, the fringes that are on the corners of our *tallitot*. Although the words of this commandment are plain enough, how we are to implement them is not completely defined. To illustrate this, let us look inside the minds of six people as they attempt to think this commandment through:

**First Person:** “I am a woman. Is this commandment applicable to me?”

**Second Person:** “I am a Gentile. Is this commandment applicable to me?”

**Third Person:** “Since wearing the *tzitzit* are to remind me of the commandments of God, might I not just as well wear a *Torah* scroll pendant around my neck as a reminder of God’s Law instead of the fringes? It would accomplish the same purpose.”

**Fourth Person:** “Should I wear *tzitzit* only during synagogue prayers, or all day long?”

**Fifth Person:** “I heard that Orthodox Jews have not been putting the blue thread on their *tzitzit* because the original source of the blue dye can no longer be found. Should I follow suit, or should I color a strand of my fringe with a blue magic marker?”

**Sixth Person:** “If I wear *tzitzit*, won’t I be mistaken for an Orthodox Jew? What if I am seen eating in a Chinese restaurant or driving a car on *Shabbat* while wearing *tzitzit*?”

Joshua, there is nothing in the *Torah* that answers any of these questions, yet all of them are reasonable. In fact, except for the “woman” and “Gentile” questions, I asked every one of them myself at one time or another and was unsure of what I should do until I prayed, and God gave me peace about how I should proceed. This, Joshua, is an example of how studying *Torah* and hearing God through the *Ruach HaKodesh* go hand in hand.

Now getting back to Romans 3:2 that I personalized earlier; I’ll now read it as it is written:

*“What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.”*

If these oracles of God (that is, knowledge of God through the *Torah* and the prophets) were committed to you, it is strongly implied that you are their custodian and are to preserve them and pass them on to others. But it is not just implied—it is commanded in what Yeshua termed the first of all the commandments, the one that all of Judaism has incorporated as its most foundational prayer; it is the *Sh’ma*:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

Joshua, look at the part of the *Sh’ma* that tells you what you are to do with God’s commandments. The first thing it tells you to do is to receive them into your own heart because that is how you

preserve and protect them. This is your first duty as their custodian; they must become fully a part of your life. Next, the *Sh'ma* tells you to teach them to others. It starts by telling you to teach them to your children (looking forward to when you have children), but not only to your children—to everyone you encounter when you walk by the way. That does not mean to literally stop everyone you pass in the street and engage them in a discussion about God's commandments, but the Scripture goes on to tell you the primary ways you are to do it. You are to bind God's commandments on your hand (which means everything you do should further God's commandments). You are to wear them on your forehead (which means all your thoughts and therefore what comes out of your mouth must also testify to who God is and what He stands for). And as for your house—whoever enters your house should sense there, the presence and *shalom* of the living God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So, Joshua, as a *Bar Mitzvah*, these are the ways that God wants you to preserve and pass on his “oracles” which are his commandments and knowledge of his prophets. But Joshua, you are not just any *Bar Mitzvah*; you are a Messianic Jew—a *Bar Mitzvah* who has received and professed faith in Messiah Yeshua. That means that the Mosaic commandments are not the only ones for which you are responsible, for Yeshua said in [John 14:15](#):

*“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”*

Yeshua not only gave commandments, but you might say that his very person—his very existence—was one of commandment, because [John 1](#) refers to him as the Word; in [verses 1 and 2](#) we read:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”*

Who was the Word? In [verse 14](#) we read:

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

Remember Joshua, you are a *Bar Mitzvah* under the New Covenant, and there is now a New Covenant law which Scripture calls “the Law of Messiah” ([Galatians 6:2](#)). This New Covenant law does indeed have some new commandments, but what is most important about it is that it is the law by which you are to now interpret the commandments that were given through Moses. Because you are under a New Covenant in which you have the New Covenant Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to assist you, you will not necessarily interpret and apply the various commandments of *Torah* in the same way that your forefathers did. This is a great responsibility that all believers in Yeshua share, but as a Jewish believer and a *Bar Mitzvah*, you have a special responsibility.

That is all I have to say right now. Please take my words seriously because I sought the Lord before committing them to writing. May God bless you and your family on this joyous day that you have become a man and a *Bar Mitzvah* in Yeshua.

—NKJ

## **Biblical Transparency**

*Delivered April 4, 2009*

Most of us in Messianic Judaism desire to live a biblical, holy, and Jewish life. We may think of how far we have come since our days of unbelief, but we also recognize how far we have yet to go. We think of the stages each of us went through that got us to where we are, each stage having its own challenges; some we came through easily, and some not so easily.

For some of us, finding out there is a supernatural world was a step, but that realization did not immediately lead us to the true God or any god. So, some of us became Buddhists, some Hindus, and some played with spiritism and occult New Age beliefs. If we survived them (of course we did or we would not be here), there was then the step of being introduced to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or perhaps we first learned about Jesus (most of us knew him by that name before we learned that his Hebrew name is Yeshua) and we eventually found out what Judaism and being Jewish (or non-Jewish) had to do with it all.

Because we came from different places and travelled here by different routes, challenges at each stage of our development were different for each of us and some of us are, even now, experiencing them with our families and in other ways. But by the grace and calling of God, we found our way to Jewish life, and we are on the path to solidifying our walk with God. We call this becoming disciples, not because we are in any kind of formal discipleship program, but because the Holy Spirit is making disciples of us. For some of us, the process is painful because becoming a disciple of Yeshua means changing things about ourselves in order to become more like him. And change often comes hard.

Perhaps some of us have wondered about how disciplined we really are, so we look at Yeshua and the disciples of Scripture for comparison and that is right provided we are honest in our self-assessments. What I want to talk to you about today is a part of that self—assessment that may have eluded us; I will call it biblical self-transparency.

There are many occurrences in Scripture where men of great faith sinned and then repented and were forgiven. We recall David's sin of taking Uriah's wife to himself and having Uriah killed on the battlefield. David did not admit his sin until the prophet Nathan confronted him with it, and only then did he admit, in 2 Samuel 12:13, that he had sinned against the Lord. His actions that followed proved his repentance but not his transparency. Why not his transparency? Because he hid his sin before it was brought to light.

See how different it was with Isaiah. Isaiah did not think about himself as being in sin until he compared his state of relative unholiness to God's holiness. We read about it in chapter 6, verses 1 to 5 of the book that bears his name:

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to*

*another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.”*

Isaiah acknowledged his sin *before* he was forced to by disclosure. You may say that God’s presence forced it, but that is really true of us all and of all sin. We do not know what sin is or in what way we are in it unless God discloses it to us in Scripture or by visitation and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

There is much in the Bible to indicate and illustrate that repenting of sin for a believer is not a choice.

Acts 17:28-30: *“for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring. Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent...”*

Luke 24:45-47: *“And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”*

2 Peter 3:9: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*

Repentance is not the same thing as transparency although it is related. Repentance is what we do to turn away from our sin, make restitution, and turn toward God. We can often do that in complete secrecy between us and God and without another person ever being aware of our sin and repentance. Transparency, on the other hand, is our willingness lay our lives open to others—to our spouses, to our children, to our parents, to our friends, to our spiritual leaders, and to our fellow congregants. It is letting them see what is going on inside ourselves, in all aspects of our lives. It is not carrying secrets—especially sinful secrets. It is not only letting others see inside us, but if there is something that is sinful or troublesome going on inside, proactively bringing it to their attention and asking for their help and prayers. Here is a Scripture that commands such transparency in the context of healing:

James 5:16: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

Confessing our sins to fellow believers when they do not know about them beforehand is a biblical principle. Such confession is proactive. It is not being found out and then confessing. But perhaps you are thinking that such transparency is only required in time of sickness, since that is the context

of [James 5:16](#). Well, sickness and being healed is not physical alone any more than *shalom* is only physical rest. Paul himself was transparent about his sins in [Romans 7:14-24](#) (I believe he is talking about his pre-Yeshua life, but even so):

*“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*

Who among us thinks less of Paul for what he admitted? Here’s more of Paul’s humility:

[1 Corinthians 15:9](#): *“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the ekklesia of God.”*

Okay, those admissions referred to Paul’s past, but here’s one of his present.

[1 Timothy 1:15](#): *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Messiah Yeshua came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*

Perhaps we do not judge Paul as harshly as he is judging himself, but here he is, admitting to Timothy (and, by extension, to any contemporary of his who reads his letter) that he considers himself a sinner. And here is another Scripture in which he reveals that there is a “thorn of the flesh” (probably a temptation) with which he is wrestling and with which he cannot rid himself:

[2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#): *“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Messiah may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Messiah’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

What does this say to us? Do any of us have thorns in the flesh that plague us? Temptations to sin? Temptations to become angry? Temptations to retaliate for wrongs done to us? Temptations to take that which is not ours to take? Temptations to sinfully walk away from our families—our wives, our husbands, our children, our congregations? Are we so naïve as to think that such temptations do not befall believers? What of Paul? Was he not a believer? What then did Paul do about his thorn in the flesh which he had to endure yet dared not fall into sin? Well, one thing he did about it was to reveal it to Timothy and probably to others as well, because we are reading about it. And what benefit did Paul get from revealing it? The benefit was accountability. Even though Timothy was Paul’s junior,

once he knew what Paul was going through, he could hold Paul accountable, and we must assume that he did because he was tutored by Paul and, at another time and in another letter (this time to the Galatians), Paul taught:

*Galatians 6:1-2: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Messiah.”*

It is perfectly plain that Paul expects believers to care for one another, and how much better it would be to help a brother or sister avoid sin than to have to restore the brother or sister after sin is committed, and damage has been done.

Many of us have been brought up to value privacy, self-sufficiency, and saving face as virtues; the problem is that they are not virtues according to Scripture. Instead the opposite is true for, according to Scripture, we are to be in community—not keep to ourselves; we are there to help others and receive help as well, and any conscious attempt we make to save face rather than repent with full disclosure is probably the result of sinful pride.

Brothers and sisters, we do not have a cultic leadership that wants to intrude into and control our lives. But God calls us to holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16), and we see from Paul’s example and other Scriptures that transparency and proactive disclosure to one another is encouraged as a way of keeping us accountable and helping us to avoid sin and stay safe. Disclosure and accountability need not be to leaders, and leaders themselves should seek to be accountable to each other. Also, accountability is fine after the fact—that is to say when something has already gone wrong so that repair and restitution can be made, and justice served. But how much better it would be if our transparency to one another could keep things from going wrong in the first place.

I would like to recommend something very simple. It is that each of us have a friend with whom we are comfortable, and with whom we are willing to be transparent—to share our thoughts, our feelings, and our temptations to sin. Now ideally, that close friend is our wife, our husband, or if we are young, our parent, because that is what close family relations are for. Some of us have not thought that is what family is for, so let me say again—that is what family is for—to be transparent and receive loving accountability in a safe place. Regrettably, for some of us, our family relationships are not what they should be, and perhaps we do not think of our husbands, our wives, or our parents as friends with whom we want to share our innermost thoughts and to whom we want to be accountable. If that is the case, our first need is not to look for an outside friend, but to take steps to repair that situation. For those of us who are unmarried adults and not living with our family, our family may still serve that function, but sometimes finding a biblically responsible friend who is a peer is the best solution. The bottom line is, though, that we all need someone to talk with and confide in, but the responsibility is ours to be proactively transparent. It does no good to have that friend, and not go to him or her to share our thoughts and feelings, and to receive wise counsel. David had that kind of relationship with Jonathan; should we desire any less?

—NKJ

## **Agape and Experiencing the Father's Love**

*Delivered April 5, 2008*

When I last shared my testimony with you on how I came to faith I also shared that the first months of my being discipled was through listening to Christian radio. One of the most influential moments in that discipleship experience occurred while I was listening to a Bible Study called "Through the Bible," taught by Dr. Vernon McGee. He was reading Genesis 5:22-24, and I heard this:

*"After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."*

"Enoch walked with God." "Enoch walked with God." I imagined Enoch walking alongside God in some kind of garden. God was a tall fatherly figure, and there was a cloak of peacefulness over the whole scene. I could not get that picture out of my mind and I decided then and there, that was what I wanted my relationship with God to be—to walk side-by-side with him, conversing with him as Father and son. And, *baruch haShem*, "God made it so."

Since that time, I have sensed God's presence continuously and, not only that, I have experienced his fatherly love, and felt able to reciprocate with my own. Since the early days of my walk, I read and been taught a considerable amount about God's love, but it had little really to do with how I related to God. What I am saying is that my perception of God's love and my love toward him developed in a natural way and not as a consequence of my knowing any biblical fact or underlying theology. However, I soon became aware that for some of my brothers and sisters in Yeshua, relating to God as their Father did not come as easily as it had for me. And I also became aware that for some, the concept of God being their Father was not a welcome idea, and for some there was even a conceptual disconnect because they had little or no experience with their earthly fathers as positive role models. Perceptions ranged from drawing a complete blank about God, to coming to all kinds of erroneous conclusions about what God was really like.

There is a familiar expression known as "preaching to the choir." The assumption underlying it is that preaching to the choir is a waste of time because choir members are supposed to be disciples and therefore do not need to be preached to. After all, would they be in the choir were it otherwise? It took me awhile in ministry to come to the understanding that the choir is sometimes a place where preaching is indeed needed. Similarly, believers in a congregation often do not wear their spiritual needs on their sleeves and, therefore, I am proceeding on the assumption that some of you here are not experiencing the Father's love—God's love—to the extent that you want to and that God wants you to. I am therefore going to take the next fifteen minutes or so to try and help a little, while being acutely aware that the subject is much too extensive for the time we have allotted. And for those of you who do not have the problem, I still urge you to pay attention because you may be called upon to minister the Father's love to others. And a caveat: Although I will be emphasizing the Father's love, Yeshua reminds us in John 10:30 that: "*I and My Father are one.*"

The first thing we must have in order to experience the love of the Father, is absolute assurance that He is so close that we can reach out and touch him. I cannot do better than to quote two Scriptures that show this:



James 4:8a: *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”*

Jeremiah 23:23: *“Am I a God near at hand,” says the Lord, ‘and not a God afar off?’”*

The next thing we must have in order to experience the love of the Father is assurance that the Father actually loves us. To show this, we again go to the Scriptures:

1 John 4:19: *“We love Him because He first loved us.”*

John 16:26-27: *“In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.”*

And lest you are disturbed by the conditionality of these two Scriptures, remember John 3:16 which is unconditional:

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

Okay. So now you are convinced that God the Father is very near to us and that He loves us. But we've heard these things before, and presumably most of us already believe them. So, where is the blockage that keeps some of us from experiencing the Father's love as a reality? Let us go back to something I suggested a little earlier. Could it be that for some, a lack of a positive experience with our own earthly fathers and mothers is interfering? I think that is so in some cases, but there is more to it. What kind of love from our parents is it that some of us have so dearly missed?

There are many possibilities but let us look at a few where the parent contributes positively to the child and still misses the mark. One person remembers his father mainly as a financial supporter of the family. Security is what that father is remembered as having contributed. Important, but not sufficient. Another person mainly remembers his father as holding to strict—even biblical behavioral standards, correcting him, not harshly, but regularly. Standards of morality, ethics and conduct is what that father has contributed. Important, but not sufficient. Another's main remembrance of his father is that he was a volunteer fireman, sacrificing his personal time and pleasures in order to serve his community. That father contributed an example of personal sacrifice for the greater good. Also important but not sufficient. And just one more—a father who is remembered for bringing his family to *Shabbat* services, and bringing Jewish traditions into the home. That father contributed to passing on Jewish identity to future generations. All of these are valuable and virtuous contributions but, if a child's memory of his father stops there there is still something for which the child yearns. If he is pressed for it, he may come to realize that what he is missing is a memory of his father's affection and that, on some level, is causing him to carry the thought that his father did not love him.

Affection? Touchy feely emotional affection? How does that stand up against *agape*, the godly kind of selfless love that wants nothing but the best for its recipient and for whom the giver of *agape* is willing to sacrifice all? We remember Yeshua himself emphasizing *agape* in John 21:15-17 when he asks Peter:

*“Simon, son of Jonah, do you agapao Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I phileo You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you agapao Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I phileo You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you phileo Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you phileo Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I phileo You.” Yeshua said to him, “Feed My sheep.”*

A great amount has been written about this exchange because, although in English versions of the Bible the Greek words *agapao* and *phileo* are both translated as “love,” in the Greek text they are distinct and, although Yeshua apparently intended to emphasize the difference (after all, he switched from *agapao* to *phileo* the third time he asked the question), Peter either did not recognize the distinction or he was avoiding it because all three times he answered that he *phileo*’d even though two of the times he was not asked that. Now the reason that this difference in the Greek words is relevant to today’s discussion is that we have probably all been taught that God’s love for us is *agape* love and not *phileo* love. For example, in [John 3:16](#), we read that God so *agapao*’d the world that he gave his only begotten son; it does not say that He *phileo*’d us. So, because we want to experience God’s love, we need to know the kind of love to expect from him—in other words, what *agape* means. And since our understanding of *agape* has mostly come through Christian teachers, I am confident that we have all been taught that *agape* is the godly kind of love—divine, selfless, deliberate, unconditional, and unencumbered by feelings, while *phileo* is more like brotherly love—an affectionate cherishing love, fraught with the imperfection of human emotions.

So, if the love we expect from God is *agape* only, we are probably not looking for nor expecting to have a relationship with him that includes emotional attachment. And here is where I believe many of us have been led astray by our former teachers. On closer inspection, I am seeing that the classical Christian view of *agape* as being a pristine divine kind of love, devoid of passion, is born out of a Hellenistic way of thinking rather than out of pre-Hellenistic Judaism. While it is theoretically possible to distinguish *agape* from *phileo*, when the Father’s love for us and our love for him is what we are talking about, the two go hand-in-hand, and they add up to the Hebrew word for love found in the *Sh’ma*, which is “*ahavah!*”

Let us just look at “*ahavah*” for a minute as it appears in [Deuteronomy 6:5](#):

*“V’ahavta—‘And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.’”*

It is clearly a commandment, but is it devoid of emotion? Is it calling us to love God by sheer effort of obedience? If so, what does it mean to love God with all our heart and soul and strength? Are not these words emotion-packed if not outright passionate?

Yes, it is true that *agape* love of God is connected to our obligation and willingness to obey him, but in the doing, the love part should come first, and the obedience part should grow out of the love; so in [John 14:15](#) we have Yeshua saying: “If you *agapao* me, keep my commandments.” You see? The

*agape* came first. Yeshua was presuming that there was a relationship between him and his disciples that would cause his disciples to want to obey him.

And this is interesting: You know that the Septuagint is an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that was translated by Jews. When we look in the Septuagint at the *Sh'ma* to find out which Greek word was used for *v'ahavta*, the love we are to have for God with all of our heart, soul, and strength, we find that the translators chose *agape*—not *phileo*!

You can see that I am building a case for broadening our understanding of *agape* to be similar to *ahavah*—a kind of love that has an emotional component. I believe this is important because God *agapao*s us and if we expect no emotional component in it, how can we even hope to “feel” the Father's love? We will not be looking for it, so nothing we normally associate with love will be perceived, and our loving God, and He loving us, will become a mere theological concept instead of a real flesh and blood relationship as we should have with a loving father.

This is not the only case where Hellenistic ways of thinking have led us away from Jewish understanding. Hellenistic thinking and the Greek language that mirrors it tend to focus on idealizations, abstractions, and expressing things in logical constructs, whereas Jewish concepts are more down-to-earth, practical, and, frankly, more human. We see this difference in the Greek word *agape* which seems to be almost unreachable, while *ahavah* is much more intuitive and tangible. But the culprit in misunderstanding *agape* is not the Greek language; it is wrong teaching that has been perpetuated from writer to writer throughout the centuries, and which may have impacted some of us. Let me illustrate by showing you a common wrong teaching about *agape* that I found on the Internet—one that many of us have been taught:

“The Greek word for love in Galatians 5:22 is *agape*. And *agape* love is a very specific kind of love. The definition of *agape* love is not sexual love or brotherly love. It is a divine, godly love; it is Christian love.”

In calling it a “divine godly love, the writer was no doubt influenced by Scriptures such as 1 John 4:19, which teaches: “We *agapao* because He first *agapao* 'd us.” If we look no further, we can easily draw the conclusion that God is the source of all *agape* love. And of course, we are all familiar with John 3:16, which states that “God so *agapao* 'd the world that he gave His only begotten son.” The problem is that a few verses later, in verse 3:19 we read:

“*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men agapao 'd darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*”

So, while *agape* is the kind of love with which God loves us and we are to love him, it is a word, like other words, that can apply to both God and to things not of God.

My friends, just think over what you know about the Bible and what you know about how God relates to man. Is it not personal? Is it not relational? Is it not emotional at times? Do we not read about times when God was angry as in Numbers 22:22? Anger is an emotion. What about times when God had regret such as in 1 Samuel 15:35? Regret has an emotional component to it. What

about when God rejoiced as in Deuteronomy 30:9? Joy can be emotional, and rejoicing is clearly emotional. And what about disappointment? We gave God plenty of reason for disappointment throughout the years, and disappointment has an emotional component as well. So why not also love? Why would God not have an emotional stake in loving us whom He created in his image and foreknew? The clear answer is that He does, and we can receive it. And one of the impediments we have to deal with in order to receive it, is the Greek idea that to be pure godly love, *agape* must be devoid of emotion.

Let us not go too far in the other direction though. There is a place for ministering *agape* out of sheer obedience to *Torah* even when we seriously dislike the person we are commanded to love. Consider, for example, Matthew 5:44:

*“But I say to you, agapao your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...”*

We can clench our teeth and force ourselves to do good to those who hate us because doing good is somewhat objective, and it can be a decision of the will. However, we cannot bless a person or properly pray for a person unless we have some kind of a positive attitude toward that person, for to utter words of blessing and prayer that we do not mean would be hypocritical; our words would have no power, and we would not be fulfilling *Torah*.

It is true that to *agapao* a person you do not have to like him. When God *agapaos* us even while we are deep in sin, do you think he likes us at those moments? So, we do not have to like our enemy or even our neighbor, but we do have to care about them.

Make no mistake. *Agape* as a commanded obligation is a high and godly ideal and we are sometimes called upon to administer it even though warm feelings and positive emotional relationships are lacking. What is important to realize though, is that the highest ideal of *agape* involves caring, and caring means feeling.

If this seems difficult, remember that our Heavenly Father can handle *agape* love a whole lot better than we can so, in our relationship with the Father, we do not have to settle for less than experiencing his love on a deep feeling level. God desires our *ahavah* love—our *agape* love—and, when it is genuinely given with all our heart, soul, and strength, He feels it much as we do when we offer it. And our Heavenly Father, in turn, offers us—all of us—a fulfilling love relationship with him on a very tangible and intense feeling level. Remember, Enoch walked with God, and we can too.

—NKJ

## **Faith, Fear, and Trauma**

*Delivered February 28, 2009*

2 Timothy 1:7 tells us:

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

We live at a time when threats to our safety and our well-being surround us, and where tragedy and catastrophe occur with regularity. Some of these threats are economic, with our government and economists seemingly unable to agree on what is best to do for the country. Some of these threats are climatic—degrading air quality, diminishing clean water, and dilemmas of how to continue using fuel without making things worse. Some of these are natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, tornados and earthquakes, and some of these are the result of imperfect technology and human error such as airplane disasters. All of these impact us negatively, and some even cause death. Besides these, there are those that are the result of evil in the world, and those for which we have no explanation at all.

Sometimes catastrophic happenings are distant from us and we can avoid thinking much about them—perhaps they are in another city, another country, another community, another family. But sometimes these occurrences come home to us, as has the recent tragic loss of our three friends, and our response to all of these in the natural is to be afraid.

But John 4:32 reminds us that we who believe have resources that the world does not know about and, once again, 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us:

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

There are two kinds of fear that the Scripture is *not* talking about. The first is the kind that causes us to jump back and defend ourselves or run away when something startles us or attacks us. That is a hormonal and physical defense mechanism that God has built into our bodies for our preservation in dangerous situations where there is no time to think or pray. Physiologists call it the response of “fright, fight, or flight.” This kind of fear persists for the duration of the danger, but it is normal, and it is helpful.

The second kind of fear that the Scripture is NOT talking about is a proper fear of God—the kind alluded to in Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 1 Peter 2:17. No, the kind of fear Scripture is talking about that is not good is the kind that is the opposite of faith in God. It is the kind that persists and becomes chronic—the kind that does not trust God with our possessions, our futures, our lives, or the lives of our loved ones. It is the kind of fear that demands to understand why a bad thing has happened so that we can console ourselves in our understanding and seek to control our destinies. Some of us have read the Bible many times through without it occurring to us that the Bible is full of bad things that have happened to innocent people. The stories often do not pierce us because they are accounts of things that happened many years ago and very far away.

But let us put ourselves in Job's place for a minute. The Book of Job begins by telling us:

*“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.” (Job 1:1)*

When we speak of being “blameless,” how much more innocent can a man be than that? Yet, for his own reasons, God removed his protection from Job and allowed Satan to wreak havoc on his life. Job lost his entire family and all his possessions, yet Scripture says of him:

*“Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. and he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” (Job 1:20-22)*

Then we are told that Job was struck with painful infections all over his body, and Job's wife entreated him to commit suicide by cursing God so that God would kill him. And what was Job's response to his wife? In Job 2:10 we read:

*“But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”*

Wow! Who among us is accepting of such adversity? If the word “adversity” does not register, I'll use another. Who among us is willing to accept such terrible things happening to us while being at peace with believing that God is in control? If the Book of Job stands for anything at all, it stands for the principle that, while we readily pray for and accept God's blessings, we must also be ready and willing to endure pain and suffering should it come our way. We should certainly not like it, but we need to be willing to endure it without accusing God or walking away from him.

Now Job did experience angst that approached despair when he cursed the day he was born and said in chapter 3, verses 20-26:

*“Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in? For my sighing comes before I eat, and my groanings pour out like water. For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes.”*

Job is a model of sorts, but he was not perfect for as we see that he fell into despair and questioned God. He recounted his various virtuous acts and essentially complained: “Why do I deserve this? Why has this happened to me?”

Elihu, Job's friend, attempted to defend God by trying to explain things to Job. He did a credible job of it, but it was unauthorized because God had no intention of justifying himself to Job or to anyone else. God did finally answer Job, but with questions—not with explanations:

*Job 38:1-18: "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: "Who is this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors, When it burst forth and issued from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band; when I fixed My limit for it, And set bars and doors; when I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, And here your proud waves must stop!' Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It takes on form like clay under a seal, and stands out like a garment. From the wicked their light is withheld, And the upraised arm is broken. Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths? Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death? Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this."*

And God goes on with many other questions put to Job, none of which can Job answer of course. The real lesson of the Book of Job to me is that God never does answer Job's questions because He does not owe him explanations, and He does not owe us explanations either. Nor does Job continue to question God and, instead, he puts himself back under God's care and says to God in chapter 42:2-6:

*"I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; you said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."*

Years ago I, like Job, wanted answers from God for things that happened but, one day, what I just shared with you hit me between the eyes and, after that, I never questioned God again. It is his will, not mine, and He owes me no explanations. Since I came to peace with that, I have been able to accept losses and disappointments in my life that previously I had not, and I have also been able to come to terms with possible future ones that I am able to imagine.

Fear seems like such a natural thing, and it is for short periods of time and when it is in response to real danger. But when it dominates or diminishes the quality of life, it is not natural; it is the spirit of fear we are warned about in Scripture, and we need to cast it out of us aggressively using the biblical tools of love and faith. Consider these Scriptures:

1 John 4:18: *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."*

Mark 4:40: *"But He said to them, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?'"*

Psalms 56:4(3)-5(4): *"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word),*

*In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?"*

Let us now look at some of the circumstances that can cause fear. They can be severe, and they can involve severe loss. I lost both my parents when they were elderly, but I lost my younger brother when he was relatively young. After each loss I felt disoriented—it was unreal that someone who had been there all my life was no longer there. I knew my parents were with the Lord, but that did not counteract the emptiness in my heart. Because I knew they were with the Lord I was not grieving for their sakes, but for mine, and I was comforted by Romans 8:28 that told me:

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*

It is hard to see how God will turn some things for good, but He will. I remember Joseph's plight on his being taken captive and sold into slavery by his brothers. Much later when Joseph had gained prominence in Egypt and was reunited with his brothers, he said to them:

Genesis 50:19-20: *"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."*

He said it then, but can you imagine how abandoned and alone he must have felt when he was first abducted? These things are put in Scripture so we can learn from them. Psalms 27:1 reminds us:

*"The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"*

And Luke 12:4 admonishes us:

*"And I say to you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do."*

In order for that Scripture to give us comfort, we have to have faith in Scripture's teaching of the afterlife, so we ought to examine ourselves and ask ourselves—"Do we?" If we do, 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 has meaning for us, and if we do not it doesn't; here is what that Scripture says:

*"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'"*

I am finished speaking to you about fear, so now I want to change the subject and speak to you about trauma to us humans that can result from disastrous occurrences like the one we have recently



encountered. The human nervous systems contain neurons that are like the electric wires in our homes. A typical extension cord in our home is rated at 15 Amperes, and as long as no more than a 1500 watt electric heater is connected to it, it will not be overloaded; it will remain cool, and it will last a very long time. However, if we connect a second heater to the extension cord, it will begin to heat up because it was not designed to carry that much electric current. Eventually, the plastic insulation of the extension cord will succumb to the heat and will melt, and the resulting short circuit will blow a fuse in our house, thereby disabling a significant part of our house's electric system.

It is much the same with us when we are assaulted by disastrous occurrences that our bodies were not built to handle. Our hormones and other chemical and electrical components move toward overload, and the result can be as mild as undetectable (as moderate as the electric wire barely heating up), or as severe as the house circuit blowing a fuse. Since we are all different each of us will react differently, and some of our reactions will be delayed like the electric wire that heats up and simmers for a prolonged period of time.

All these reactions to stress are normal among humans; it is the disastrous occurrence that is abnormal. Nevertheless, like the wire that we notice is heating up, we want to do something about our condition if we notice ourselves heating up. Now I know we do not really heat up, but we do sometimes begin to experience certain difficulties following a disaster, so we need to recognize them and take steps to return ourselves to our former (presumably peaceful) state.

It turns out that between the military's experience with battlefield trauma and years of civilian experience with disasters such as airplane crashes, storm destructions, and the terrible attack of 9-11, much has been learned about human responses to stressful encounters and how to deal with them. In fact, there has developed an entire specialty of psychological counseling and chaplaincy that is now devoted to helping victims of disasters heal from their emotional and spiritual wounds.

It happens that a friend of our congregation, Rabbi Michael Weiner, who leads a Tikkun Messianic Jewish congregation in Knoxville, introduced us to a chaplain whom he knows well and who is certified in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, which is part of the ministry of Disaster Spiritual Care. At my request, he will be visiting us, and he wrote this for me to read to you:

*"Sometimes we come to a time in life when trauma can wound our heart and soul, and we search for answers and try to find solace in a broken and chaotic world. Whenever something catastrophic hits our sphere off its axis, our world is forever changed. Your congregation has just gone through a very serious traumatic event that will affect you for many years to come. Because of your Rabbi's and elders' love and care for you as a family, they want to provide you with every means available toward a path of biblical healing, and so they have invited me and my associate in ministry Rabbi Michael Weiner to visit you in a few weeks, at which time I will share some personal experiences, and speak to you further about how to cope with events such as you have encountered."*

We look forward to the chaplain's visit but, meanwhile, let us pray.

—NKJ

## **Fear in Fearful Times**

*Delivered March 27, 2010*

These are fearful times. We are conducting a war in two countries, trying to keep one rogue nation from acquiring nuclear weapons, another from using ones they already have, and trying to broker peace between Israel and entities sworn to destroy her and build their capitals in Jerusalem. Meanwhile our economy has gone south, too many are out of work, we have a new national health plan that few people understand and that no one knows how to pay for, and men are marrying men, and women are marrying women. On top of all that, every few weeks there seems to be a major earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a record snowstorm, a damaging flood, or a tsunami somewhere in the world. As for this local region, being in the shadow of the Capitol we are ever aware of the potential for a terrorist attack.

All of these have the potential to shake us and cause us to fear if we let it. I say it that way because, according to Scripture, we do not have to let it. 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us:

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

What we are seeing that is so unsettling, is what God has told us would happen. The reason it is unsettling is that we’re actually seeing it and experiencing it instead of just reading about it. Just look at these predictive Scriptures and see if you do not recognize them in what is going on around you:

2 Timothy 3:1-5: *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.”*

Matthew 24:6-8: *“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”*

1 Timothy 4:1-3: *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”*

2 Peter 2:1-3: *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”*

Luke 21:24-26: *“And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken.”*

Zechariah 12:3: *“And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.”*

These prophecies were not given to us to evoke fear, but to assure us that God is in control. Fear and insecurity are the opposite of faith. They rob us of the joy and *shalom* that God wants us to have even while going through such perilous times. Are we believers or are we unbelievers? If we are believers, let us benefit by our faith and embrace what God has given us to believe:

Hebrews 13:6: *“The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”*

Psalms 27:1: *“The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?”*

Proverbs 3:5-6: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”*

Philippians 4:6-7: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Messiah Yeshua.”*

1 Peter 5:6-7: *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”*

Psalms 42:6(5): *“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.”*

Luke 12:22-26: *“Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?”*

Romans 8:26-28: *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that*

*all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*

Philippians 4:13: *“I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me.”*

Psalms 34:5(4): *“I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.”*

Those are but a few of the Scriptures that exhort us to place our trust in God and not be afraid. Hear this though. God does not promise us immunity from suffering. I know that some of us have been taught that God will rapture believers before the great tribulation, but I do not believe that. I see much more evidence in Scripture that believers will acquire inner strength through faith and the Holy Spirit so they can be godly witnesses amid the tribulation. Our congregation’s elders have recently become aware that some in our community believe they have received prophetically from God that there will soon be a disruptive event of some kind that will affect the Washington, D.C. area and they have begun to make preparations that include storing food and purchasing gasoline. The elders cannot affirm those words, but there is a reality of potential danger in living near the Nation’s Capital as we do, so making preparation against several days’ loss of infrastructure service is not unreasonable even in the absence of a prophetic warning.

Nevertheless, we ought not to be afraid and, if we are, we should stop everything we’re doing and meditate on Psalms 23 because that is what it is for. Let us recite it together now:

Psalms 23: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.”*

*Amen.*

—NKJ

## Fun, Enjoyment and Biblical Life

*Delivered May 7, 2011*

I was privileged to give a message at La Cena del Señor the Sunday just before this past *Pesach*. The first part of the service was musical, much like ours, except that their dancing was mainly individual—not coordinated as ours typically is. There was one exception though. When their instrumentalists played a song called “I am free,” most of the congregants came up front, and when the words of the song said:

*“I am free to run, I am free to run  
I am free to dance, I am free to live for you,  
I am free, yes, I am free, I am free.”*

They ran to the left, then they ran to the right, and back and forth, and back and forth. There were people of every age doing this—squealing, laughing, and obviously enjoying the physical abandon of it all.

I could not participate, but I would probably not have anyway because I am not used to those kinds of exuberant expressions. So, I found myself sitting back and pondering what I thought of it all. Everyone was clearly having fun, and I imagined the possibility that some had come to the service just for that! The question I found myself wrestling with was whether, what seemed like a controlled melee was a legitimate form of praise and worship, or was it just fun and recreation?

But then I surprised myself by thinking, “So what?” Does everything in a service have to be justified as either praise or worship? Indeed, what if a few of the youths found this particular time so appealing that it was the one thing that got them out of bed to come to the service that morning? Would that not be a good thing? After all, even if this rushing to and fro was not utilized by everyone as praise or worship, they were at least there for the other parts of the service.

Since then, I have been mulling over this idea of having fun in the Lord and how it might translate to our own Jewish expression. Right off, I got to thinking about how we use noisemakers and “boos” when Haman’s name is mentioned on *Purim* during our reading of Esther. And in that, we even go further than than La Cena because what we do actually interrupts the reading of the Scriptures. I also thought of our *Chanukah* parties and how the games have nothing to do with the Festival’s meaning or history but are just plain fun.

And then there is our way of dancing in the service that we consider a form of praise and worship. We explain it as being similar to David dancing before the Lord, but David’s way of dancing was probably more like what I observed at the church than ours because David’s way almost certainly lacked choreographed steps and sequences. I am assuming that our dance team knows how to keep its attention on the Lord during dancing, but what of the others who rush to join in the most lively of the dances with big smiles on their faces? What of the children who are barely coordinated but love to be dragged along? Is everyone’s attention on God when they’re dancing? I expect not, but it sure is fun, and we accept it for what it is. I am sure you’re aware that most synagogues and a significant

number of churches do not allow dancing during their services, but we do, and we love it. But does it always rise to the level of praise and worship? Probably not, but our enjoyment of it adds to the over-all service experience, and if we did not have it, we would surely miss it.

I have said a lot about dancing, but what I really wanted to talk about today is a broader subject. It is about having fun as part of our life with God and our appreciating the lighter sides of life. Our congregation is like a little United Nations in that we come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, some of which eschew the idea that it is okay with God if we have fun. Don't dance! Don't shout! Don't lift your hands! Don't listen to fast music! Don't watch movies! Don't do sports! That is where some of us come from. Of course, we have our "don'ts" also: "Don't work on the Sabbath!" "Don't eat pork!" And there are others as well, but our "don'ts" generally are meant to uphold Scripture and not to diminish our having fun, pleasure, or enjoyment.

There are some interesting passages about enjoyment in Ecclesiastes that I want to call to your attention. I do not often quote Ecclesiastes because much of it is not meant to be taken literally, but I think these passages speak to what I am trying to get across. Keep in mind that when Solomon wrote these words, he was reflecting on his life of excess. First [Ecclesiastes 2:1-11](#) that shows us the wrong way to pursue enjoyment:

*I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter—"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?" I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments<sup>1</sup> of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.*

Now let us jump ahead a bit, and glean from Solomon what God really means enjoyment to be:

[Ecclesiastes 2:24](#): *Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.*

[Ecclesiastes 3:9-13](#): *What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do*

*good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.*

In my pre-Yeshua life, like many of us, I partook of and enjoyed both the good and the bad. When I gave my life to God, I was convicted to give up what was bad but not to give up having fun and enjoyment in life, which I always saw as good. Yet, around me, and especially in certain fundamentalist environments, people sometimes seemed to be so serious about their religious pursuits that having fun and enjoying other aspects of life were pushed to the side. Even in our own communities, some of us do little outside of work, family, and synagogue. No hobbies, no travels, no excitements to make the blood flow. Marie and I do not live like that. True, I cannot correlate photographing nature, fishing for bass, doing archery, or camping with any biblical commandment, but things like these are clearly spices in our lives.

Now I want to confess something to you. It is that Marie and I often do these activities and activities similar to them in the afternoon after *Shabbat* services. I got called on it once by someone who quoted from [Isaiah 58](#) and tried to persuade me that I was doing wrong by seeking pleasure on the Sabbath by engaging in activities other than prayer and study. He referred to [Isaiah 58:13-14](#) that says:

*If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.*

I read it, and I read it, and I read it again, and still I did not get from this Scripture what my well-meaning friend was trying to convince me it meant. This Scripture is not saying that on the Sabbath we have to abstain from what we like doing and from things that give us pleasure. It is merely urging us away from pursuing pleasures of which God disapproves—from engaging in ways that are not God’s ways. A help in understanding this comes from a word that is in most English translations of the Scripture; it is the word “own,” the equivalent of which does not appear in the Hebrew. Nevertheless, most of the translators inserted it because, when you use that word, you are comparing yourself to someone else—in this case, to God. The phrase “*not doing your OWN ways, nor finding your OWN pleasure*” speaks not of ALL “ways” and “pleasures,” but only of those that are not of God, including those that violate the Sabbath commandment to rest from work. This same Scripture tells us that the Sabbath is to be a delight; how can it be a delight if delight can cause us to violate the Sabbath? Even though Yeshua was not talking about recreation, I think what he had to say about the Sabbath as recorded in [Mark 2:27](#) is relevant; He said:

*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

Well, let me wind this up now. What I hope this little talk has accomplished is getting you to see that there is no contradiction between being a disciple of Yeshua and having fun—including on the Sabbath—provided it is the right kind of fun.

—NKJ

## **God's Plan for a Happy and Fulfilled Marriage**

*Delivered September 2, 2017*

Today, I want to speak to you about God's plan for a happy and fulfilled marriage. It is a topic that is especially dear to me because God has blessed Marie and me with such a marriage, that is now in its forty-third year. Not only us, but all of the elders have such marriages. Scott and Sherry have been married for forty-five years, Bruce and Nita for forty-one years, and Doug and Cindy for thirty-five years. Our new rabbi Aaron and Brooke have been married for only five years, but they're young and have some catching up to do.

But my marriage to Marie was not always peaches and cream when it began in 1974 largely because, for its first two years, I was not a believer and Marie was (what I would describe as) a nominal believer. The point is, that neither of us knew much about (or were committed to living according to) God's Word.

I have to confess that Marie's treatment of me in those days was far godlier than my treatment of her. I was entirely wrapped up in myself and in what everything and everyone meant to me. You have no doubt heard the saying "He thinks everything revolves around himself?" Well, that is the way I viewed the world and everyone in the world, Marie included. Now don't get me wrong; I did have very strong feelings for Marie and I dutifully embraced my obligations to her, but as far as I was concerned, my marriage to Marie was mainly a matter of my personal gratification. Marie provided me with companionship, physical affection, domestic help, social acceptability, and even extra income since Marie was full-time employed.

It is a little off topic, but I'll give you a small idea of how little regard I had for Marie's feelings prior to our marrying. I met Marie at a party, and later called to ask her if she would go on a date with me. I did not think to ask her what kind of date she would enjoy; I just assumed that it would be one that I would enjoy. So, she dressed up for the date the way that most women did in those days, and when she answered her front door wearing a dress and heels, she encountered a virtual woodsman wearing hiking boots and a very large machete strapped to my waist. "Why are you dressed like that," I asked her? "We're going hiking! Change your clothes!" Well, she did change her clothes instead of slamming the door and calling the police (which is what she should have done) because I later learned that she was in fear of me all during the time of the hike. It seems that just that week a knife-wielding crazy-man had attacked several women in Montgomery County; he was still at large, and Marie thought I was that man.

That was before we were married, and it was amazing that our relationship got any further. But we did marry, and my self-serving presumptiveness continued even to the planning of our honeymoon. Now most of you who are married probably recall discussing and planning for your honeymoon which no doubt involved spending a weekend or a week at a resort or some other beautiful and relaxing place. Not me! I didn't ask Marie—I told her how we would spend our honeymoon. We would motorcycle down the coast of Florida from Fort Lauderdale to Key West and back, staying at mostly fleabag motels along the route. But how would we get to Fort Lauderdale with our motorcycle? I had that figured out too. We would dismantle it, put the parts in suitcases along with a thermos of gasoline, and check the suitcases on Amtrak. And you know what? Marie went along



with it. We took the train from Washington to Fort Lauderdale, opened the suitcases, assembled the motorcycle on the train platform, poured the gasoline into the fuel tank, checked the suitcases at the Fort Lauderdale train station, and off we went on our motorcycle honeymoon. And we returned home the same way in reverse.

Well, it was fun telling you about it, but it has its serious side, which is that in those days everything in my world had to be about me and for me, and that included Marie. As far as I was concerned, she was there for me, and that created discord and several fights because I was beset with macho pride and had a volatile temper. Then, one day in 1976, two years into our marriage, I had a supernatural visitation from the Holy Spirit, and right then and there I knew that God existed; before that, I did not.

As a result of the Spirit's visit and impact on me, I was brought to the place of realizing that there was a God, however, I still did not know who Yeshua was. But I had a profound desire to know who he was and, for a week and a half, I spent hours reading the Gospels from a "Gideon" New Testament that I had been given on a college campus and that I had squirreled away in a drawer. The Bible-reading was not convincing me, but a week and a half into it I had a second supernatural visitation, and suddenly and completely without logic, I believed that Yeshua was exactly who that New Testament I was reading said he was.

I did not immediately tell Marie about my first encounter with the Holy Spirit because I thought she would ridicule me. But she noticed that a change had come over me, and she liked the change because I began to show a softness and concern for her in a way that she had not previously experienced. At the time, I did not know that it was happening, but I know now that the change in me was the Holy Spirit and that which is promised in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

*"Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation—the old has passed [away]; look, what has come is fresh and new!"*

I continued to change in several ways, but the bottom line of all the changes was that I began catering less to myself, and more to the needs of others, including to Marie. As you might imagine, it had an immediate and profound effect on the quality and *shalom* of my marriage. It should not surprise us because Scripture is replete with commandments and exhortations to love and serve others before ourselves; here are just a few:

Luke 10:27b: *"You are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your understanding; and your neighbor as yourself."*

Mark 8:34: *"Then Yeshua called the crowd and his talmidim to him and told them, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him say 'No' to himself, take up his execution-stake, and keep following me."*

Romans 12:10 *"Love each other devotedly and with brotherly love; and set examples for each other in showing respect."*

Ephesians 5:22-25: *“Wives should submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord; because the husband is head of the wife, just as the Messiah, as head of the Messianic Community, is himself the one who keeps the body safe. Just as the Messianic Community submits to the Messiah, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. As for husbands, love your wives, just as the Messiah loved the Messianic Community, indeed, gave himself up on its behalf,”*

1John 3:16: *“The way that we have come to know love is through his having laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers! [and in this case our wives]”*

Now why am I giving this testimony to a room filled with believers? It is because I have come to find out that not all believers who are married or will be married have incorporated God's plan for a happy and fulfilled marriage into their lives. So foundational is marriage in God's eyes, that He refers to his relationship with his people Israel as a marriage, and to himself as our husband. We read in Jeremiah 31: 31b(32b):

*“I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI”*

And in Isaiah 54:5a we read:

*“For your husband is your Maker, ADONAI-Tzva'ot is his name. The Holy One of Isra'el is your Redeemer.”*

And we read Paul's address to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:2:

*I would like you to bear with me in a little foolishness—please do bear with me! For I am jealous for you with God's kind of jealousy; since I promised to present you as a pure virgin in marriage to your one husband, the Messiah;*

God intended marriage for mankind right from the beginning. He created Adam in his own image, and later separated Adam's maleness from his femaleness, giving him Eve as his helper. But despite having Eve alongside him, Adam was incomplete and so God directed that a man should marry a woman, thereby returning the two to something like their original condition of being in one flesh. Stated another way, man is incomplete without woman, and woman is incomplete without man. Husbands and wives (because they are male and female) complement each other, and together they are in God's image. And since part of God's image is that of a creator, God provided the means by which a man and his wife could bring new life into the world (creation if you will)—not by speaking it into existence as God did, but through physically joining their seed. Here are Scriptures that document what I have just said:

Genesis 1:27-28a *“So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. God blessed them: God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.”*

Genesis 2:18-24: *“ADONAI, God, said, “It isn’t good that the person should be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him.” So from the ground ADONAI, God, formed every wild animal and every bird that flies in the air, and he brought them to the person to see what he would call them. Whatever the person would call each living creature, that was to be its name. So the person gave names to all the livestock, to the birds in the air and to every wild animal. But for Adam there was not found a companion suitable for helping him. Then God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the person; and while he was sleeping, he took one of his ribs and closed up the place from which he took it with flesh. The rib which ADONAI, God, had taken from the person, he made a woman-person; and he brought her to the man-person. The man-person said, “At last! This is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She is to be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” This is why a man is to leave his father and mother and stick with his wife, and they are to be one flesh.”*

Notice that according to Genesis, although the word “marriage” is not used, “marriage” under God consists of a man and woman covenanting to join together into one flesh. It is not merely living together, although living together is implied. It is not merely having sex together, although having sex together is also implied. Marriage is much deeper than either of those; it is returning to mankind’s original condition of Eve being part of Adam, and male and female being one flesh.

So, the most common order of things is for men and women to marry and have children, and their married children to have children, and so forth. But there is also a place for singleness in God’s master plan, for we read in Paul’s address in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35:

*“What I want is for you to be free of concern. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord’s affairs, with how to please the Lord; but the married man concerns himself with the world’s affairs, with how to please his wife; and he finds himself split. Likewise the woman who is no longer married or the girl who has never been married concerns herself with the Lord’s affairs, with how to be holy both physically and spiritually; but the married woman concerns herself with the world’s affairs, with how to please her husband. I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to put restrictions on you—I am simply concerned that you live in a proper manner and serve the Lord with undivided devotion.”*

Now married partners are a team and, in every team, there are those that lead and those that follow and help. A team that is leaderless accomplishes little, and a leader without anyone to lead accomplishes nothing. Both are needed, and neither is more valuable than the other. And so it is with a team of married partners, for we read in 1 Corinthians 11:3:

*“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is the Messiah, and the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of the Messiah is God.”*

And also, Colossians 3:18-19:

*“Wives, subject yourselves to your husbands, as is appropriate in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and don’t treat them harshly.”*

And Ephesians 5:22-23:

*“Wives should submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord; because the husband is head of the wife, just as the Messiah, as head of the Messianic Community, is himself the one who keeps the body safe.”*

So, the leader of the marriage team is the husband, and the helper and follower is the wife. This is consistent with Eve having been drawn out of Adam to be Adam's companion and helper and, if we try to reverse the husband's and wife's roles or remove the roles altogether, there is bound to be “trouble in River City.”<sup>3</sup>

Now I began this message by revealing to you how focusing on myself—catering to my own needs and desires more than to Marie's—could have severely threatened our marriage. But God was gracious to reveal himself to me at a time when I was not looking for him, and He changed me from the way I was, to the way He wanted me to be (and the way I had to be) if my marriage to Marie was going to be happy and fulfilled.

Yes, God has a plan for his children to have happy and fulfilled marriages, and his plan consists of these three things:

1. Living a biblically submitted life with our husband or wife, and putting God first and the other second.
2. Putting an end to focusing on self, and instead turning toward loving and serving the other.
3. Willingly and joyfully embracing our male calling to lead or our female calling to help—whichever of these applies.

What is interesting and amazing about embracing God's plan for a happy and fulfilled marriage is that, while it seems that the “dying to self” that is required of us will be hard to do, the opposite is true. We were made for the roles that God intended for us, and so instead of being restrictive they are immensely releasing and fulfilling.

I hope this message will be helpful, and I want to end it by sharing a poem that I wrote in 1997. Its title is “Marie:”

Marie, Marie, wife to me,  
Without whose life I'd nowhere be.  
Life....  
Wife....  
Selflessly....  
Gift from God enduringly.

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<sup>3</sup> “Ya Got Trouble”—“The Music Man,” Meredith Wilson, 1957.

Marie, Marie, wife to me,  
Devoted helpmate lovingly.  
Love....  
Dove....  
Faithfully....  
I thank God for you endlessly.

—CJB

## How Discipled Are We?

(Dying to Self)

*Delivered May 12, 2018*

In Scripture, the Greek word “*mathetes*”<sup>3</sup> and the Hebrew word “*talmid*”<sup>4</sup> are generally translated “pupil,” “scholar,” or “disciple.” The sense in which the words are used is not that the persons to whom they refer are merely students as they would be in a classroom, but rather learners at the feet of a teacher from whom they seek to learn, and whom they seek to emulate.

The concept of discipleship is built into the role that parents are to have with their children when, in Proverbs 22:6, we read:

*“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

Notice that the Scripture does not say “instruct,” but rather “train up.” The role of a parent is to be a discipler of his or her child, and the role of the child is to be his or her parent’s disciple. Discipleship is teaching by example; the parent or “discipler” displays, by his own conduct, how his child or disciple should conduct himself or herself, and the disciple is entreated to follow. Now clearly, the intent of Proverbs 22:6 is not that the child should follow a parent who is not following God. We can be disciples of men and replicate their worldly ways, but that is not what Scripture calls us to. We are to be disciples of God—not of men. The men who are our “disciplers” must therefore themselves be disciples of God, so that the traits they pass on to us are God’s traits—not theirs. The apostle Paul discouraged the cultic following of men when, in 1 Corinthians 1:12-15 he said:

*“Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Messiah.” Is Messiah divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I immersed none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.”*

And as if that were not clear enough, in 1 Corinthians 3:3-7 he also said:

*“... for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”*

One of the earliest examples of a “disciple” who was also a “discipler” was Moses. Moses’ approach was to lead the Israelites in being obedient to God’s *Torah* as well as to certain instructions

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(mentioned in Scripture) that God gave him to pass on to Israel. When Moses delivered God's instructions, he did not say "These are my instructions; be sure to follow them." He made sure that the Israelites knew that they were God's instructions; and the one time he did not, he paid the price of not being allowed to enter the Promised Land. We read about this in Numbers 20:7-10:

*"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.' So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?'"*

Big mistake! Continuing with verses 11 and 12:

*"Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'"*

At first, Moses' ways of discipling the Israelites were to proclaim God's word publicly (e.g. bringing Israel the commandments from Mt. Sinai), and also judging their disputes. There came a time, however, when the burden became too much for him, and his father-in-law, *Yitro*, intervened; we read in Exodus 18:17-23 that he said to Moses:

*"The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace."*

We know from the Scriptures that follow that Moses did as *Yitro* suggested and that it led to a good result. So, let us look at the men that Moses appointed:

- They had previously been taught "the statutes and the laws."
- They had been shown "the way in which they must walk"
- They had been shown "the work they must do."
- They were found to be "able men."

- They were found to be men “such as fear God.”
- They were determined to be “men of truth.”
- They were judged to be men who hated “covetousness” (in some translations: “dishonest gain”).

The process that *Yitro* suggested to Moses was the process of “discipleship,” the intended result being to produce others, in addition to Moses, who could carry forward God’s work among the Israelites. First, Moses was to intercede for the people and ask God to take charge of the difficulties that were sure to arise. Next, Moses was to stand before all the people and teach them the *Torah* and how to live, walk, and work, according to it. Out of this educated people, Moses was then to select a workable number of men whom he thought were suitable, but he was to then examine them to assure their abilities and godly qualities. He was not to select women because the roles these men were to have were those of elders.

The process and purpose of discipling was the same many years later for Yeshua as it was for Moses. Yeshua knew that he, like Moses, could not reach all of Israel during his lifetime and without help, so he chose twelve men to disciple in much the same way that Moses chose 70:

Mark 3:13-15: *“And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:”*

Matthew 10:5-6: *“These twelve Yeshua sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*

Before Yeshua sent his disciples out he taught them. One way he taught them was to answer their questions and respond to their requests, such as when one of them said to him: *“Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples”* (Luke 11:1). And of course, we know that Yeshua’s response was to utter the words that we now call “The Lord’s Prayer.” But the reason the request could be made and responded to was that Yeshua’s disciples clustered around him to learn from observing how he lived and ministered. Yeshua’s invitation to those he chose to be his disciples can be summarized with the words *“Follow me!”* (Matthew 4:19). We sometimes think that Yeshua’s invitation to follow him only meant “Travel with me.” More broadly though, he was telling his disciples that they needed to leave the worldly ways of their former lives and take up the Kingdom’s ways of *his* life.

We know that Yeshua lost one of his disciples (Judas) and gained one (Paul) after his death. After Yeshua’s death and resurrection, he remained with his eleven disciples for 40 days (Acts 1:3), during which time, he instructed them:

Matthew 28:18-20: *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”*



Notice that Yeshua’s first “sending out” of the twelve in [Matthew 10:5-6](#) was to make disciples among the Jews only, while his second “sending out” in [Matthew 28:18-20](#) was to “make disciples of all the nations.” This was no doubt in furtherance of Israel’s covenantal responsibility to be the “*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” that we read about in [Exodus 19:6](#), and also to be “*a light to the Gentiles,*” as we read in [Isaiah 42:6-7](#):

*“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.”*

It is also why Paul echoed Yeshua’s priority of bringing the Gospel message first to the Jew when he said, in [Romans 1:16](#):

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Messiah, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”*

Now my purpose in giving this message is not for our random edification, nor to explain discipleship as an ancient form of education that worked pretty well for Moses and Yeshua. My purpose is to show that it is important for all of us because it is the biblically prescribed way that we are to grow in the Lord. Just as in Yitro’s list that he gave to Moses, our discipleship must have educational, spiritual, practical, and character components—all of them.

There are both differences and similarities in discipleship under Moses compared to under Yeshua. Under Moses, the Holy Spirit was not active in the average Israelite, so his or her discipleship had to be almost exclusively connected to *mitzvah* obedience. Under the New Covenant, the *mitzvot* are still important, but we are in a better interpretive position because we have the Holy Spirit to help us. Yeshua pointed to it when he sent the eleven out to “*make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” ([Matthew 28:19](#)). Notice that Yeshua acknowledged the Holy Spirit even though the Spirit had not yet fully come and would not fully make his appearance until the fiftieth day following Yeshua’s future death and resurrection.

On first impression, one might think that the criteria required to be a disciple of Yeshua are 100% different than those for being a disciple of Moses. Well, they are different but not 100% different. When we think of being a disciple of Yeshua, we think of becoming like him in our thoughts, faith, attitudes, and commitment to serving others. Yeshua is our example of ultimate sacrifice—not only his death on the Roman *stauros*,<sup>6</sup> but his life that was devoted to loving and obeying his Heavenly Father, and loving his neighbor—us; in these ways, he exemplified his words in [Mark 12:29-31](#) that quotes from [Deuteronomy](#):

*“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the*

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<sup>6</sup> Tree or stake

*first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.*”

Yeshua also exemplified his words in John 15:13:

*“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*

We really do not think of Moses in any of these ways.

Since the discipleship differences of Yeshua and of Moses are obvious, I will not dwell on the differences but will go on to show in what ways they are similar; their main similarity is that they both require obedience to *Torah* which, broadly understood, means God’s teaching. In Moses’ case it is, of course, obedience to the commandments of the *Torah*. In Yeshua’s case it is that, plus obedience to him personally, as he is recorded to have said in John 14:15:

*“If you love Me, keep My commandments. “*

Now to further tie these two discipleships together, consider that agreeing to obey the will of another as against one’s own will requires (what we might term) “dying to self.” Whether it is obeying the commandments given at Mt. Sinai or obeying commandments given by Yeshua, they are the same because both require putting God’s will before our own. Both are the essence of the Gospel message and cannot be treated separately even though they arise from different eras and in different covenants.

So, must I give up my life in order to be a disciple of Yeshua? Must I die a horrendous death as he did? Must I go looking for someone who is in a burning building so I can lose my life while rushing in to save him? Well, that which God requires of us is substantial and is often difficult but, for most of us, our physical lives will not be on the line (although for some of us it will). “Dying to self” is not a physical death as Yeshua suffered, but it is, nevertheless painful because it means serving the interests and needs of others before (and sometimes instead of) our own. It often involves sharing our time, our affections, our possessions, or our money with others. It is a death that we must all endure if we want to serve God in any capacity.

Now some of us will utter a sigh of relief that we need not die physically, without realizing how difficult “dying to self” can be. Many of us have been taught, from childhood, the protective advice of Sergeant Stan Jablonski of “Hill Street Blues,” which is “Let’s do it to them before they do it to us!” The fact is, refusing to “die to self” for the sake of others is at the root of much relational unhappiness and personal un-fulfillment, whereas embracing it, with godly faith, is the path to a meaningful life and peace.

By the numbers now:

- (1) “Dying to self” for God and others is the message of the Gospel.
- (2) Preoccupation with self against the interest of others is the opposite of the Gospel.

- (3) Our willingness to work on “dying to self” is the beginning of discipleship.
- (4) Our honest assessment of ourselves that we are willing to “die to self” and to act against self-interest when God calls us to do so is a mid-way point in discipleship.
- (5) If we actually do it when we are tested—that is, follow God’s leading and succeed in serving others’ needs against our own desires and self-interest while being tempted to do the opposite, we have risen above the mid-point on the scale of discipleship.
- (6) If we are consistent in passing such a test, we are above 75%.
- (7) There is probably no way of getting to 100%, but we should pursue getting there, nevertheless.

The title of this message is “How Discipled Are We? (Dying to Self).” I did not mention it earlier because I wanted us to concentrate on the biblical principles and not on trying to answer the question. But now that we’ve heard the principles, I recommend that each of us evaluate ourselves and try to answer the question: “How Discipled Am I?”

—NKJ

## Immersion in the Ruach HaKodesh

*Delivered October 21, 2017*

We first encounter “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” in John 1:31-34:

*“Then Yochanan gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and remaining on him. I myself did not know who he was, but the one who sent me to immerse in water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining, this is the one who immerses [baptizes] in the Ruach HaKodesh.’ [the Holy Spirit], and I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.”*

We do not often speak of the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” in Messianic Jewish circles because the term is so *goyishe*-sounding that it is difficult to portray it as a Jewish phenomenon. That is no doubt the reason that, in his Complete Jewish Bible, Dr. Stern uses the expression “immersed in the *Ruach HaKodesh*,” rather than “baptized;” “immersed” sounds better to Jewish ears. So, in Acts 1, Stern’s translation begins:

*“Dear Theophilos: In the first book, I wrote about everything Yeshua set out to do and teach, until the day when, after giving instructions through the Ruach HaKodesh to the emissaries whom he had chosen, he was taken up into heaven. After his death he showed himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. During a period of forty days they saw him, and he spoke with them about the Kingdom of God. At one of these gatherings, he instructed them not to leave Yerushalayim but to wait for “what the Father promised, which you heard about from me. For Yochanan used to immerse people in water; but in a few days, you will be immersed in the Ruach HaKodesh!” (Acts 1:1-5).*

But what did Yeshua mean by “you will be immersed in the *Ruach HaKodesh*,” and what was its value? We read a little further and we find out, as Yeshua explained:

*“But you will receive power when the Ruach HaKodesh comes upon you; you will be my witnesses both in Yerushalayim and in all Y’hudah and Shomron, indeed to the ends of the earth!” (Acts 1:8).*

Apparently, when the disciples were immersed in the Holy Spirit they received power that they did not previously have, and that enabled them to be Yeshua’s witnesses in the Holy Land (i.e. to their fellow Jews), and “to the ends of the earth,” meaning to the Gentile nations. I imagine that the disciples understood Yeshua’s words but did not fully appreciate that they did not already have the power of which Yeshua was speaking. After all, they knew Yeshua personally. They had lived with him and were taught by him both before and after his crucifixion and resurrection. How more empowered could they be?

Anyway, as Scripture continues, Yeshua is taken up to heaven, after which “they [the disciples] returned the Shabbat-walk distance from the Mount of Olives to Yerushalayim.” (Act 1:12). But why were they hanging out in Jerusalem in the first place? The average answer you will hear is “because Jesus told them to,” but that is not the reason. The reason is that *Shavu’ot*, the Feast of Weeks (that

Christians call Pentecost), was ten days away and the disciples needed to be in Jerusalem to perform their firstfruits sacrifice in obedience to Leviticus 23:15-16:

*Acts 2:1-8: The festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak. Now there were staying in Yerushalayim religious Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered; they were confused, because each one heard the believers speaking in his own language. Totally amazed, they asked, "How is this possible? Aren't all these people who are speaking from the Galil? How is it that we hear them speaking in our native languages?"*

These diverse languages are what some translations call "tongues," and the powerful happening that occurred was what Yeshua promised: "you will be immersed in the Ruach HaKodesh," that is, "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5 [New King James Bible]), and "...you will receive power when the Ruach HaKodesh comes upon you;" (Acts 1:8a [New King James Bible]).

This immersion in the Holy Spirit that was accompanied by power, and tongues was not just a one-time event for we read in Acts 10:45-46 how it happened again in Peter's ministry later on:

*"All the believers from the Circumcision faction who had accompanied Kefa were amazed that the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh was also being poured out on the Goyim, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God."*

And also, in Acts 19:1-6 we read:

*"While Apollos was in Corinth, Sha'ul completed his travels through the inland country and arrived at Ephesus, where he found a few talmidim. He asked them, "Did you receive the Ruach HaKodesh when you came to trust?" "No," they said to him, "we have never even heard that there is such a thing as the Ruach HaKodesh." "In that case," he said, "into what were you immersed?" "The immersion of Yochanan," they answered. Sha'ul said, "Yochanan practiced an immersion in connection with turning from sin to God; but he told the people to put their trust in the one who would come after him, that is, in Yeshua." On hearing this, they were immersed into the name of the Lord Yeshua; and when Sha'ul placed his hands on them, the Ruach HaKodesh came upon them; so that they began speaking in tongues and prophesying."*

Even before the Holy Spirit fell on Shavu'ot and while Yeshua was in his resurrected human form, he directed his disciples prophetically:

*"As you go throughout the world, proclaim the Good News to all creation. Whoever trusts and is immersed will be saved; whoever does not trust will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who do trust: in my name they will drive out demons, speak with new tongues, not be injured if they handle snakes or drink poison, and heal the sick by laying hands on them."* (Mark 16:15-18)

There are believers both within Messianic Judaism and Christianity who do not believe that what happened at *Shavu'ot* in the First Century can happen today. Although I can show you from Scripture that it can, my time in giving this message is limited, and I want to make the point through my own testimony.

I remember the time shortly after I committed myself to Yeshua and was, as the Scriptures say, "*Born Again!*" My entire life had changed from the way it was, and I was on fire for the Lord. I eagerly devoured the Scriptures and even gave up practicing law for a time, because I perceived that my practice did not measure up to what the Bible taught. I was also studying in a doctoral psychology program, and I gave that up as well for a similar reason.

I wanted to learn, and I could not contain my enthusiasm about my new-found Truth. What more could there be? Well, there was more that I was not able to conceive of until I, like the disciples, was immersed in the Holy Spirit. In reflection, I was energized by the enthusiasm of my discoveries that God was real and that Yeshua was the Messiah but, although I was not aware of it, the way I was approaching my life in Yeshua was driven more by my intellect than by spiritual empowerment. I studied a lot and learned a lot, thought that I knew a lot, and was quick to offer what I knew to others. So far as I was concerned, I had it all.

But one day, I was invited to a meeting of the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship. I did not want to go but I did and, after the speaker concluded his message, he called for those who wanted to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to come up and be prayed-for. I did not go up because I figured I did not need that kind of *hocus pocus*, but as I was walking across the room toward the exit, one of the Fellowship members whom I did not know and who did not know me, called to me: "Sir," he said, "Would you like to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit? Come up and let us pray for you."

Well, I was embarrassed to say that I did not want something that was supposedly of God, so I allowed him and another man to lay their hands on my head and pray. And they prayed, and they pushed on my head. And they prayed, and they pushed on my head some more. I had previously seen people fall to the floor when people prayed for them, and I did not like it at all. Apparently, these two guys who were pushing on my head wanted me to fall down like the others had done, and I was not about to falsify my witness by complying. But they were persistent, and eventually I decided that the only way I was going to get out of their clutches was to make them happy by falling down, and so I made myself fall. The ruse worked because as soon as I let myself fall they stopped pushing and praying, and walked away leaving me on the floor feeling foolish.

But then something strange happened. As I was lying on the floor, my jaw began to move spasmodically as though on a rubber band. Wow, that is weird, I thought. "What in the world is this?" I was not saying anything, but my mouth was moving by itself. I had heard of the gift of tongues that was associated with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit; could this be it? But I was not making a sound, so I decided to try and vocalize a sound through my moving mouth to see what would happen. When I did, my mouth began emitting sounds that seemed to be words, but words that I could not understand. Far out! (That's an expression we used in those days). I let it happen for a while and then thought: "I wonder if I can stop it?" So, I tried to stop my mouth from moving and found that I could. It was under my control but, when I relaxed, the movement of my mouth

resumed. When I had had enough, I got up, found my wife Marie, and went home. Marie had been in another part of the large crowded room and had not seen any of this, for which I was grateful.

I assumed that I had spoken in what the Christians said were tongues but, in the days that followed, the automatic tongues I had experienced did not resume. Day after day I hid away and tried to mouth sounds, but they were unnaturally forced, and seemed to just be gibberish. I shared my consternation with a friend who had heard that trying to sing in tongues sometimes brought them out. I tried it and it worked; apparently, I was inhibiting the flow of the tongues because I had gotten emotionally worked up over trying and failing, and the singing relaxed me; at least that is what I supposed was the reason. Eventually, my tongues became fluent without my having to sing and, ever since, I have been able to pray easily with words that I do not understand. As for the automatically uttered tongues that I first experienced, they never returned, and I never heard of anyone else who had experienced them the way I had.

The tongues experience was interesting, but it is not what is most significant. What is significant is that, from the day I first spoke in tongues, my spiritual emphasis shifted from the cerebral to the supernatural, and it dramatically deepened the way I related to God and understood the Bible.

Now let us go back to the Scriptures and try to understand why immersion in the Holy Spirit was so important for the disciples and why it is equally important for us today. Yeshua's disciples were promised power that would be brought upon them by the Holy Spirit—such power as to enable them to become witnesses to Yeshua the world over. We need that power also, to have the boldness, the wisdom, and the effectiveness to lead those to whom we witness to a saving knowledge of Yeshua, and to oppose the evil one who would keep us from doing it. We need that power to be able to rid ourselves and others of unclean spirits that the enemy (Satan) sends to oppose us, and we need it to heal and to ward off afflictions that he would bring upon us to keep us from succeeding.

When we read the account in [Acts 2:1-8](#) of what happened at that *Shavu'ot* (when the Holy Spirit descended upon those in attendance), what initially jumps out at us is the phenomenon of speaking in tongues—that is, foreign languages that were not naturally known by those who were assembled. But what should impress us more is that the disciples of Yeshua who were immersed in the Holy Spirit were imbued with power just as Yeshua had promised ([Acts 1:8a](#)). Consider, for example, the boldness that came upon Peter as we read in [Acts 2:14-21](#):

*“Then Kefa [Peter] stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice to address them: “You Judeans, and all of you staying here in Yerushalayim! Let me tell you what this means! Listen carefully to me! These people aren't drunk, as you suppose—it's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken about through the prophet Yo'el: ‘ADONAI says: “In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out from my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy. I will perform miracles in the sky above and signs on the earth below—blood, fire and thick smoke. The sun will become dark and the moon blood before the great and fearful Day of ADONAI comes. And then, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved.”*

Peter continued to speak boldly of Yeshua—how Yeshua had demonstrated that he was from God by performing “*powerful works, miracles, and signs*” in the presence of those assembled, and that they nevertheless sent him to the Romans to be crucified. But death would not be able to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:24), and Peter concluded by saying:

*Acts 2:32: “God raised up this Yeshua! And we are all witnesses of it!”*

We, like those in the upper room, need God’s Spirit poured out upon us. We need to see those wonders in heaven and signs in the earth. We need assurance that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, any unbeliever who ventures through our doors will come under conviction to call on the Name of the Lord and be saved! Notice that when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples, Peter stood up and spoke in boldness. Peter the fisherman. A moment earlier he did not have such knowledge or such boldness, but after he was immersed in the Holy Spirit he became different. He went on to testify about Yeshua, and we continue to read in verses 33-41:

*“Moreover, he has been exalted to the right hand of God; has received from the Father what he promised, namely, the Ruach HaKodesh; and has poured out this gift, which you are both seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into heaven. But he says, ‘ADONAI said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’ Therefore, let the whole house of Isra’el know beyond doubt that God has made him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua, whom you executed on a stake!”*

*“On hearing this, they were stung in their hearts; and they said to Kefa and the other emissaries, “Brothers, what should we do?” Kefa answered them, “Turn from sin, return to God, and each of you be immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah into forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh! For the promise is for you, for your children, and for those far away—as many as ADONAI our God may call!” He pressed his case with many other arguments and kept pleading with them, “Save yourselves from this perverse generation!” So those who accepted what he said were immersed, and there were added to the group that day about three thousand people.”*

Now let us be clear. Being immersed in the Holy Spirit is distinct from being Born Again of the Spirit, and while “tongues” often accompanies the immersion, it does not always. We indeed need the Holy Spirit in order to be reborn, and that is a work of the Holy Spirit’s power. But there is an extra measure of power that is given to us when we are immersed in the Holy Spirit, and this does not always occur when we first confess Yeshua.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, there are many of us who are “born again” (i.e. marked for eternal life) and yet have never experienced the fullness of the Spirit’s power. In Acts 8:14-17, there is a biblical account of new believers in Yeshua who, even after being water-immersed in the Name of Yeshua, did not “receive the Holy Spirit” until hands were laid on them at a later time:

*“When the emissaries in Yerushalayim heard that Shomron had received the Word of God, they sent them Kefa and Yochanan, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the*

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<sup>7</sup> Some persons are Born Again and immersed in the Holy Spirit at the same time or in close succession.



*Ruach HaKodesh. For until then he had not come upon any of them; they had only been immersed into the name of the Lord Yeshua. Then, as Kefa and Yochanan placed their hands on them, they received the Ruach HaKodesh.”*

So, in conclusion: There is an immersion of the Holy Spirit (some call it a filling of the Spirit) that imbues us with greater power than most of us experienced when we first received Yeshua and became born again.<sup>8</sup> I have more to say about this and about praying and prophesying in tongues, but the time I am allotted for this message requires that I stop at this point. There are some in this room who need a filling of Holy Spirit but do not realize it. That is easy to understand because, for some of us (as it was for me), the experience of being born again resulted in such an extreme make-over that we cannot conceive of there being more. That was what I thought, but I was wrong. So, at the close of the service, I invite anyone who has not yet been immersed in the Holy Spirit and would like to be, to come forward for prayer.

—CJB

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## Mitzvot and Tzedakah

(A Two-Part Message)

*Delivered December 5, 2009*

### Part One

There have been several attempts in Jewish history to codify God's Word into numbered commandments; the Hebrew word for "commandments" is "*mitzvot*." The earliest of these attempts was called *Hilchot Gedolot*, which was a work that was published sometime in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century by Simon Kairo. By that time, a principle had already been established in the *Talmud*, that the total number of commandments in the *Torah* was *Taryag* (613); and of these, 248 were positive (*mitzvot aseh*), and 365 were negative (*mitzvot lo ta'aseh*).

Anyone who attempts to number *mitzvot* in the *Torah* expecting them to add up to 613 soon realizes that there are decisions to be made like:

- What should one consider to be a commandment? How must it be stated? Does it have to be stated "I command you," or can it be implied and less obvious?
- What level of inference is allowable? Can we construe a commandment from a situation?
- How do we count similar expressions of God's will that are stated differently at different places in the Scriptures?
- Do we count as two *mitzvot*, those that are expressed both in the positive and in the negative in different verses of Scripture, or do we count them as one?

It is not surprising that those who have attempted this work have often come to different conclusions as to exactly what the *mitzvot* in Scripture are and how many there are.

To bring consensus, Judaism needed a scholar of such prestige that he could define 613 *mitzvot* that would be acceptable to a majority of the Jewish community. Such a scholar emerged in the person of Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) who, sometime prior to 1170 c.e., wrote his compilation of *Torah* law in Arabic under the title *Kitab Al-Fara'id* (The Book of Divine Precepts). He subsequently revised his work and so, by the end of his life, there were two Arabic texts or versions of *Kitab Al-Fara'id* in existence. Unlike his predecessors, Maimonides was careful to follow defined principles—fourteen in all—to justify his conclusions; that made all the difference, and his work eventually received almost universal acceptance. Three contemporaries of his translated his Arabic texts into Hebrew, and these translations became known as *Sefer haMitzvot*—"Book of Commandments," as it is known today.

As an academic achievement, Maimonides' enumeration of *mitzvot* was huge. However, it was too exhaustive to be a convenient tool in the post-Temple era, when many of the *mitzvot* dealing with sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood could no longer be performed. Enter Rabbi Yisrael Meir haKohen, known as "the Chafetz Chaiyim." In 1931, Rabbi Meir published his *Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar* (The Concise Book of *Mitvot*), in which he extracted from Maimonides' list, 297 *mitzvot*—77 positive, 194 negative, and 26 applicable only in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Meir

intended his book to be a compilation of *mitzvot* that could be observed by Jews of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and particularly in the diaspora. Let me give you an example of some of the *mitzvot* described by Maimonides so you will get a feel for their usefulness.

Maimonides' positive *mitzvah* number 73 has to do with confessing our sins. It is drawn from Numbers 5:6-7 which reads:

*“Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged.’”*

Maimonides extracts from this the following:<sup>9</sup>

*“By this injunction we are commanded to make oral confession of the sins we have committed against the Lord (exalted be He) after we have repented of them. This is the form of the confession: ‘O God, I have sinned, I have committed iniquity, I have transgressed, and I have done thus and thus.’ One must elaborate and ask forgiveness with all the eloquence at his command.”*

For Messianic Jews and *Torah*-adherent Gentile followers of Messiah Yeshua, neither Maimonides', nor Meir's works are a sufficient guide for daily conduct and for relating to God. The reason is that New Covenant believers acknowledge the continuing priesthood of Yeshua, look to regular communication with the *Ruach Hakodesh* for personal guidance (including guidance in applying Scripture), and seek to be obedient, as well, to the teachings contained in the *Kitvey B'rit Chadashah* (the New Testament Scriptures). By contrast, Rabbinical Jews who do not acknowledge the New Covenant have no sacrifice for sin and none of the benefits of an interceding priesthood, so their approach to God is necessarily limited. That notwithstanding, New Covenant believers (both Jews and Gentiles) have the same need as Rabbinical Jews for a handy compilation of Scripture-based *mitzvot* to assist them in their walk of obedience. It is a Jewish approach.

Dr. Dan Juster and I are collaborating on a book called “The Law of Messiah” in which I list and comment on the *mitzvot*, recognizing New Covenant commandments as well as those from the *Torah* that are enumerated by Maimonides and Meir. Let us take, for example, the Maimonides positive *Mitzvah* number 71 that I mentioned a few minutes ago, that speaks of confessing our sins to God. In my book, I add the implied commandment from James 5:16:

*“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

You see, this New Covenant Scripture expands the requirement that we confess to God, to confessing to one another; it is only implied though, because it is spoken by James—not directly by God.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles B. Chavel, editor and translator, *The Commandments*, v1, p. 83 (New York: The Soncino Press, 1967).

The challenge in writing *The Law of Messiah* book has been to provide a tool that parallels the older works in form, but which adds additional Scriptures and provides interpretation for New Covenant application. Undergirding this attempt is my conviction, based in Scripture, that the *Torah* which God gave to the ancient Israelites is relevant and applicable today for both the Jew and the non-Jew, albeit sometimes differently for each. Here are some Scriptures from the Complete Jewish Bible that speak to that:

*“The same teaching is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you.”*  
(Exodus 12:49)

Romans 15:4: *“For everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that with the encouragement of the Tanakh we might patiently hold on to our hope.”*

1 Corinthians 7:19: *“Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing; what does mean something is keeping God’s commandments.”*

Galatians 3:24: *“Accordingly, the Torah functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came, so that we might be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful.”*

2 Timothy 3:16-17: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.”*

Hebrews 10:1: *“For the Torah has in it a shadow of the good things to come, but not the actual manifestation of the originals. Therefore, it can never, by means of the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, bring to the goal those who approach the Holy Place to offer them.”*

Just a word about Exodus 12:49 that the *Complete Jewish Bible* translates: *“The same teaching is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you,”* and that the New King James Version translates *“One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.”* This verse of Scripture is often wrongly generalized to mean that all the commandments of *Torah* are applicable to Jews and Gentiles in the same way. This is a mistaken view because the context of this Scripture is of the sojourner who desired to eat the *Pesach* and thus needed to be circumcised. Even if one generalizes the verse from its narrow context of *Pesach* and circumcision, the Complete Jewish Bible’s choice of the word “teaching” rather than “law” suggests that there may be different applications for the Jew and the Gentile.

## **Part Two**

So now that you have the idea about using *mitzvot* to focus in on what God requires of us, let me speak to one example, which is what we are to do with our money to help others who are in need. I’ll begin with a page from my book, *Mitzvah* #B1, which states:

*“We are to lend money without interest to our brother, sufficient for his need and without regard for the Sabbatical Year.”*

This precept is derived from several Scriptures recognized by Maimonides and Meir, and one that is omitted by them. First, Exodus 22:24(25) which states:

*“If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest.”*

This Scripture does not require that we lend money to our poor brother but, if we do, it states that we must not charge him interest. It is explained in Maimonides’ positive and negative *mitzvot* 197 and 237 respectively, and Meir’s positive and negative *mitzvot* 62 and 53 respectively.

Next, we come to Leviticus 25:35-37 which reads:

*“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.”*

This Scripture says that we must help our poor brother so that he can continue to live among us, but it does not say in what way we must help. It does say, as in the previous Scripture, that if we lend him money we cannot collect interest on the loan. Maimonides’ and Meir’s negative *mitzvot* 235 and 54 respectively recognize only verses 36 and 37; I added verse 35.

Next, we come to Deuteronomy 15:7-8 which reads:

*“If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.”*

What this adds to the subject is our obligation to lend to a poor brother, and to do so willingly. This is treated in Maimonides’ positive *Mitzvah* #197 and negative #232, as well as Meir’s positive *Mitzvot* #38 and his negative #62.

Moving right along, we go to the next verse in Deuteronomy 15, which is verse 9:

*“Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.”*

This verse is really important because it tests a person’s willingness to trust God. It requires that we lend to our poor brother even if it is just before the seventh year of release, after which we will not

be able to demand repayment. This is dealt with in Maimonides' negative *Mitzvah* #231, and Meir's positive *Mitzvah* #62.

Finally, an interesting one, Deuteronomy 23:21(20) (see also Hebrews 23:21):

*“To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.”*

What's this? God says we can be hard-hearted and charge interest to a poor non-Jew but not to a brother Jew? But Leviticus 25:35 commands us:

*“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.”*

You see that, in this Scripture, the role is reversed. Here, we are told that we must help a poor brother Jew on the same level as we would a poor non-Jew, so clearly Deuteronomy 23:21(20) is not meant to apply to needy persons, but rather to normal business transactions. The point that is being made is that, even in a business transaction where we can normally charge interest, we cannot charge interest to a brother Jew.

Now this is all pretty complicated so, in my book, I condense all of this to the one statement:

*“We are to lend money without interest to our brother, sufficient for his need and without regard for the Sabbatical Year.”*

And I also expand the meaning of “brother” from only brother Israelite, to brother in Yeshua, regardless of where he lives or the faith community with which he affiliates.

There are many other Scriptures and *mitzvot* that speak of how we are to provide for our brother who has fallen on hard times but I will not go into those now because I want to use my final minutes to focus on something we are facing currently. We are living at a time when our brother believer next to us who had a job yesterday may not have one today. He may have been able to pay his rent and buy food yesterday, but he may not be able to do either today. To those of us who are in that situation, please hear me. It is part of our obligation as disciples of Yeshua to put aside any pride we may have and ask for help if we need it. Now to others of us who do not need help but our brother believer alongside us does, Scripture requires that we help him in every way that is possible and reasonable.

Giving money is always a sacrifice because when we give it, we cannot spend it on ourselves. We may be giving *tz'dakah* individually, but those of us who are members of this congregation should know that our tithes and offerings partly go to *tz'dakah*—benevolence to support fellow members and others who are in need. Lately, some of our brothers' and sisters' needs for serious financial help have increased at the same time that the tithes coming into our storehouse have decreased. Part of that is to be expected because when brothers are not doing well financially their tithes go down or even stop, and that is as it should be because a tithe is a percentage of our increase.

But I am speaking now to those of us who do have jobs and are earning income. We must not allow our tithes to the Lord to drop below the ten percent to which we have all agreed when we became members. The tithe money we give in the Lord's name goes to paying our congregation's bills, supporting our ministries, and very substantially to helping our needy brothers and sisters weather the financial storm that is affecting the entire country.

In speaking to those of us who are employed and have our financial heads above water, I say *Baruch HaShem!* To those of us who are not, I do not want to embarrass you by raising this issue, but I have to raise it. I know most of you and know that your financial difficulty is caused by the times—not by any flaw in your character. There was a time in my own life when I was pretty well down and out and had to be rescued, and I am grateful for the rescue. Since then, *Baruch HaShem*, I have been able to pay my bills (but at times barely) and even now, it would not take much of a financial set-back to cause Marie and me grave difficulty. We are grateful for what we have, but we are living paycheck to paycheck by faith as are most of you. I tell you this to assure you that we are all in similar circumstances, and all connected when it comes to assisting one another.

God is in control but know that when He promises in Scripture to meet our needs, one of the ways He does it is through the generosity of each other.

—NKJ

## Participating in the Wider Jewish Community

*Delivered February 22, 2014*

It may surprise some of you to know that not all Messianic Jewish Congregations consider themselves to be part of the wider Jewish community. Perhaps it does not surprise you because you know that many in the wider Jewish world do not consider Messianic Jews to be part of their community. Not only that, but many Christians in the Church see it the same way—that because we believe in Jesus, we are part of the Church and are therefore not Jewish because everyone knows that Jews do not believe in Jesus. Right? Wrong! Those among us who were born Jewish know we are still Jewish, and for us that is a settled matter.

But what is not settled is what it means to be Jewish beyond just having Jewish genes. Is our congregational community a part of wider Judaism or some kind of third species? After I came to faith in 1976 and joined Beth Messiah Congregation in Rockville Maryland, I did not consider Beth Messiah “Jewish;” I and the other Beth Messiah members considered our congregation “Messianic Jewish”—part of the Christian world—not part of the Jewish world. To us at that time, the wider Jewish world was completely bankrupt because it did not believe in Yeshua. In our eyes, only we were the true and continuing Judaism, and the only hope for anything good coming out of the other Judaism was for it to repent and become part of us.

Over the years I changed my views about my identity as a Messianic Jew—not about the importance of believing in Yeshua, but about my identity as a Jew among Jews. And I changed my views about the capacity and continuing responsibility of Jewish non-believers in Yeshua to serve God with the godly attributes they possess. What changed my views? Primarily two things: (1) Exodus 19:5-6, and (2) the Jews who inhabit Israel. First the Exodus Scripture:

*“Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [priests] for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”*

I read that Scripture soon after I came to faith, but the depth of it did not hit me at first. My initial understanding was that my sole responsibility as a Jewish believer in Yeshua was to minister Yeshua to my fellow Jews who did not believe and bring them to salvation. I understood that I was to minister to Gentiles that God might cause to cross my path as well, but I saw my principle role as ministering to Jews, with eternal life being the only end product that I thought to be of importance. It is an understatement to say that I was influenced by the evangelical point of view that I had been taught.

However, over time, Exodus 19:5-6 and also Genesis 17:4-5 impacted my thinking. Genesis 17:4-5 says:

*“As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations.”*



The significance of Abraham being the “father of many nations” began to grow on me. “Many nations.” Why “many nations?” Did God not make his Covenant with Abraham to be the father of the Jewish nation? I had always thought of Abraham as being the patriarch of the Jews, but this seemed to be saying something much more expansive. And then the Exodus 19 Scripture. God said that those following Moses, the Israelites (later to be called Jews), were to be a “kingdom of priests”—“a nation set apart.” Priests to whom? To themselves? That does not make sense, so we must be priests to the other nations—the Gentile nations of the world.

So, I a Jewish believer in Yeshua am a priest. Awesome! But God was not speaking to Messianic Jews in Exodus 19:5-6, He was speaking to just plain Jews. More and more, I saw that the covenantal responsibility of being priests to the Gentiles of the world was given to all Jews, and that a Jew does not abrogate his responsibility to the covenant by not recognizing Yeshua.

Now why do I say that the Jews in Israel influenced my thinking? It is because the majority of the Jews in Israel today are not believers in Yeshua and yet, every day of their existence is a priestly testimony to the rest of the world of God’s existence. They are largely unaware of it, but they are serving God through their very lives. Now don’t get me wrong. A Jew who has not embraced Yeshua, the Holy Spirit, and the New Covenant, cannot function as fully in his priestly calling as one who has, but that does not mean that he has nothing of God with which to serve.

Now that I have explained my beliefs concerning the covenant responsibilities of individual Jews, both Messianic and non-Messianic, I will return to what I began to speak about, which are Messianic Jewish congregations and our congregation in particular. We consider our congregation to be a home for Messianic Jews and Gentiles who have come alongside us. And since the Messianic Jews within our congregation have covenantal Jewish responsibilities, so does our congregation. So, are we are genuinely part of the wider Jewish community of congregations? They say “No,” but we say “Yes.”

Is that merely *chutzpah*<sup>10</sup> on our part? Let us take our queue from the Bible:

Matthew 4:23-24: “*Yeshua went all over the Galil teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing people from every kind of disease and sickness. Word of him spread throughout all Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill, suffering from various diseases and pains, and those held in the power of demons, and epileptics and paralytics; and he healed them.*”

We see that Yeshua spent much time teaching and ministered healing in local synagogues, and God used his participation in Jewish religious life to spread his Word. Similarly, in Matthew 13:53-54, we see that Yeshua taught in his childhood synagogue:

*“When Yeshua had finished these parables, he left and went to his home town. There he taught them in their synagogue in a way that astounded them, so that they asked, “Where do this man’s wisdom and miracles come from?”*”

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<sup>10</sup> Yiddish for “flagrant audacity.”

And in Luke 4:33-36, we read that Yeshua cast out demons in the synagogue:

*“In the synagogue there was a man who had an unclean demonic spirit, who shouted in a loud voice, “Yaah! What do you want with us, Yeshua from Natzeret? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” But Yeshua rebuked it: “Be quiet, and come out of him!” The demonic spirit threw the man down in the middle of the crowd and came out of him, having done him no harm. They were all astounded and said to one another, ‘What kind of teaching is this? Why, he gives orders with power and authority to the unclean spirits, and they come out!’”*

Yeshua also frequented the Holy Temple; Matthew 21:12-14 is just one of the instances where he healed the blind and the lame:

*“Yeshua entered the Temple grounds and drove out those who were doing business there, both the merchants and their customers. He upset the desks of the money-changers and knocked over the benches of those who were selling pigeons. He said to them, “It has been written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer.’ But you are making it into a den of robbers!” Blind and lame people came up to him in the Temple, and he healed them.”*

And, very significant, is that Yeshua ministered in ordinary places within the Jewish community as well:

Luke 4:38-40: *“Leaving the synagogue, he went to Shim’on’s house. Shim’on’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him to do something for her. So, standing over her, he rebuked the fever; and it left her. She immediately got up and began helping them. After sunset, all those who had people sick with various diseases brought them to Yeshua, and he put his hands on each one of them and healed them;”*

Okay, you say, “That was Yeshua, and we are not Yeshua; we are his disciples.” Well then, consider one of his disciples, the Apostle Paul. He ministered both in the synagogue and in the Temple. We read in Acts 17:1-3:

*“After passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, Sha’ul and Sila came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue. According to his usual practice, Sha’ul went in; and on three Shabbats he gave them drashes from the Tanakh, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and that “this Yeshua whom I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.”*

On another occasion, in the Temple, the results of his ministry were less positive:

Acts 21:27-30: *“The seven days were almost up when some unbelieving Jews from the province of Asia saw him in the Temple, they stirred up all the crowd and grabbed him. “Men of Isra’el, help!” they shouted. “This is the man who goes everywhere teaching everyone things against the people, against the Torah and against this place! And now he has even brought some Goyim into the Temple and defiled this holy place! (They had previously seen Trophimus from Ephesus in the*

*city with him, and assumed that Sha'ul had brought him into the Temple.) The whole city was aroused, and people came running from all over. They seized Sha'ul and dragged him out of the Temple, and at once the gates were shut.”*

I do not know why I am giving you just these few examples. I might as well have handed you the entire New Testament, since all of Yeshua's time and a substantial amount of his disciples' time was spent among and within the wider Jewish community of their day—in Judaism's institutions and in ordinary places, but clearly among Jews who did not believe that Yeshua was whom he claimed to be and was. It was natural for them to do so because the wider Jewish community was the community into which they were born. Yes, they formed new communities of believers and fellowshipped there also but, except for when some of them (like Paul) travelled to predominantly Gentile cities, they connected with their Jewish people wherever they were.

Now what about us? We call ourselves a Jewish congregation and think of ourselves as being part of the wider Jewish community, but is it reality? Do we as a congregation participate in or contribute to Jewish works that are not Messianic? Do we as a congregation have a relationship with Orthodox, Conservative or Reform synagogues? Do our members belong to Jewish organizations, make use of facilities at Jewish Community Centers, participate in Jewish causes, and occasionally visit other synagogues? A very few of us do, but generally the answer is “No!” So, on what basis do we say that we are part of the wider Jewish world? We explain our non-participation by saying that we have been rejected in the past, and that we will surely not be allowed to participate. But have we tried hard enough? Have we pressed in? Yes, we have been rejected, and often are still rejected, but did the Apostle Paul quit trying because he was rejected?

I would like there to be for us the dawning of a new day of Jewish Community participation, making it a reality that we are a Jewish congregation and a legitimate part of the wider Jewish world. To help us move in that direction, I have asked one of our members to research and make available to us, opportunities in Virginia, DC and Maryland where our members who desire it can participate in Jewish activities and be among Jewish people in the process. These include attending lectures, joining and volunteering in Jewish organizations, joining the local JCC, attending synagogue services, helping out at cultural events, supporting causes for Israel, and many others.

What I am proposing is that we become part of the wider Jewish community as a natural extension of our lives while not hiding our faith in Yeshua. The idea is to normalize our lives as Jews or Gentiles among Jews. It is not to overtly evangelize, but I am confident that the testimony of our Messianic faith will have its effect. In concert with this, I am also proposing that we begin using the minor Jewish holidays (days that we do not have services) to join with the wider Jewish community in their observances. One such day coming up is *Yom HaShoah*, or Holocaust Remembrance Day. This year, it falls on April 28, and there will be many activities on that day from which we can select.

—CJB

## Passing Down Our Heritage

*Delivered December 29, 2012 on the Occasion of Eliana's Bat Mitzvah*

Eliana, your *d'rash* dealing with the passing down of our heritage was excellent. You began with David instructing his son Solomon on how to live a godly life and how to be a godly king of Israel. The most important thing that David taught Solomon is found in 1 Kings 2:3-4, in which David said:

*“Observe the charge of ADONAI your God to go in his ways and keep his regulations, mitzvot, rulings and instructions in accordance with what is written in the Torah of Moshe; so that you will succeed in all you do and wherever you go. If you do, ADONAI will fulfill what he promised me when he said, ‘If your children pay attention to how they live, conducting themselves before me honestly with all their heart and being, you will never lack a man on the throne of Isra’el.’”*

You then went on to speak about the *Torah* portion you read to us, Genesis 49:8-14, in which Jacob blessed his sons before he died, and you expressed your own prayer and expectation that God will give to you and your future husband, children who will want to follow after both of your examples. You were right in saying that your children will want to follow you, because that is God's design—that children will want to be like their parents and do what they see their parents do. That is the reason that Proverbs 22:6 reads:

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

The examples of David and Jacob are different from each other. Jacob's blessings were prophetic in that they foretold the future for each of his children and grandchildren. David's charge to Solomon was instructive; but it was more than that because Solomon understood his father—not only by his father's words, but also by what he knew about his father's life. David did some bad things in his life, but his example to Solomon was one of his having become a humble and repentant servant of the Lord. Had that not been so, it would not have mattered what David said or how often he said it; Solomon would have received it as empty hypocritical preaching.

When Proverbs exhorts us to *“Train a child in the way he [should] go;”* it is not just addressing the words we use. It is exhorting us to exemplify what we teach so that by observing us, our children will have good role models to follow. Was that not what God himself did by sending his son Yeshua to earth in the form of a natural man who we could observe and follow?

The Bible contains many passages telling us that we learn though following the example of those who teach us. Here are four Scriptures that describe Yeshua being an example to us:

Mark 1:17: *“Yeshua said to them, ‘Come, follow me, and I will make you into fishers for men!’”*

Luke 6:40: *“A talmid is not above his rabbi; but each one, when he is fully trained, will be like his rabbi.”*

1 Peter 2:21: *“Indeed, this is what you were called to; because the Messiah too suffered, on your behalf, leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps.”*

1 John 2:5b-6: *“This is how we are sure that we are united with him. A person who claims to be continuing in union with him ought to conduct his life the way he did.”*

And here are several Scriptures that describe Paul setting an example to those for whom he had pastoral responsibility:

First, Paul to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 4:16b: *“Therefore I urge you to imitate me.”*

1 Corinthians 11:1: *“...try to imitate me, even as I myself try to imitate the Messiah.”*

Next, Paul to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:17: *“Brothers, join in imitating me, and pay attention to those who live according to the pattern we have set for you.”*

Philippians 4:9a: *“Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and seen me doing;”*

Next, Paul to Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:12b: *“...on the contrary, set the believers an example in your speech, behavior, love, trust and purity.”*

Next, Paul to Titus:

Titus 2:7a: *“...in everything set them an example yourself by doing what is good.”*

And finally, Peter to believers in Yeshua:

1 Peter 5:2-3: *“...shepherd the flock of God that is in your care, exercising oversight not out of constraint, but willingly, as God wants; and not out of a desire for dishonest gain, but with enthusiasm; also not as machers domineering over those in your care, but as people who become examples to the flock.”*

With so much biblical evidence, one would think that, among believers, the importance of our teaching our children through setting an example would be self-evident and that there would have been no reason for you Eliana to give your *d'rash*, or for me to give this message. Regrettably, that is not the case and I will tell you why. It is because many of us who became believers were not believers in our earlier lives and would never have considered giving a *Bat* or *Bar Mitzvah d'rash* of the kind we heard today. Eliana, you have not even entered high school yet you are looking ahead to when you will have children, and you are already planning for how you and your husband will be an example to them. That kind of forward thinking will surely influence who you marry, and it will bode well for the success of your future family.

When I became a *Bar Mitzvah*, marriage, and children, and God were the furthest things from my mind as I am sure they were for many of us. Even later, the idea of being a godly example for my children was not on my radar screen and, when I became a believer, my focus was mostly on my salvation and not on my responsibility to convey covenantal biblical values to my children.

Now why am I making such a point of this? First, some of you here who are hearing this message are of an age to be contemplating having children or are already in the midst of raising them. For you, the timing of this message is perfect because you have the opportunity to have a maximum of influence. Others of you here are older as I am and although you are praying for your children and thinking that you have missed your opportunity. Well, let me tell you that with God it is never too late, and despite our age and our children's age, our children will always be looking at their moms' and dads' lives and be affected by them one way or another. It is never too late for us to repent in areas where we need to repent. When we do, our children (no matter how old they are or how old we are) will be watching.

Now some of you young men and women who are still in your teens and are hearing this message may be thinking: "My future marriage and having children are so far off—isn't this premature for me to be considering?" No, it is not! For you, I cannot overemphasize the importance of taking Eliana's *d'rash* to heart because these, your teen years, are the ideal time of your life to prepare for the kind of influence you are going to have on your future family and on others. In fact, you may have already discovered that your young age enables you to be influential right now. Children already look up to you and want to follow your example. And you may not realize it, but adults who need to improve in areas of their lives and see that you, as young as you are already "have it together"—they cannot help but think: "If that youngster can do it, so can I."

So far, I have spoken only about passing on "personal" values to our children and about the importance of our life-example in successfully doing it. The personal values to which I am referring are love, faith, morality, and biblical knowledge. But there is something else in God's plan that He wants us to pass on, and that is "covenant" or, more precisely, "covenant identity." If we are Jews who do not yet know Yeshua as our Messiah, our covenant identity through Abraham has yet to be fulfilled. If we are Gentiles and do not yet know Yeshua, our covenant identity has yet to be established. If we are believers in Yeshua (whether we are Jews or Gentiles), each of us has a covenant identity attained through our faith, along with related covenant responsibilities that God wants us to pass on to our children. These responsibilities are (1) to proclaim the Good News of Yeshua to all; (2) to serve others as there is a need and as we are led by the Holy Spirit; and (3) to pass down our covenant and its responsibilities to our children.

If we are Jews, our Covenant history begins with Genesis 17:4-7:

*"As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.*

The next Jewish encounter with covenant takes us to the time of Moses, where God makes a follow-up covenant with the Children of Israel, to whom God refers as “a kingdom of priests.” We read of this in Exodus 19:5-6:

*“Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.” These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”*

Then, we read in Jeremiah 31:32(33)-33(34) that God said He will make a New Covenant with the House of Israel and Judah (the Jewish People) despite the fact that they breached the previous covenant—not the Abrahamic Covenant, but the one we call the Mosaic Covenant. When the New Covenant came into existence through Yeshua, the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:1-2:

*“Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.*

And in Romans 11: 26b-27, he wrote:

*“As the Tanakh says, “Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer; he will turn away ungodliness from Ya’akov and this will be my covenant with them,...when I take away their sins.””*

Those are the covenants that God made with the Jewish people directly but remember that God intended for Israel to be a priestly nation to the other nations of the world. So, God extended his influence through the Jewish People to the Gentiles by allowing them, through faith in Messiah, to be grafted into an “olive tree” symbolic of Israel, thereby becoming joint heirs (or family members) with their Messianic Jewish brother and sister believers. We read about this in Romans 11:17-25.

So, let us now look at what the Bible has to say about this Gentile covenant identity that is acquired through faith, and let us look first at Ephesians 2:11-13 and 19-22:

*“Therefore, remember your former state: you Gentiles by birth—called the Uncircumcised by those who, merely because of an operation on their flesh, are called the Circumcised—at that time had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Isra’el. You were foreigners to the covenants embodying God’s promise. You were in this world without hope and without God. But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah’s blood.” ... “So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of God’s family. You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being Yeshua the Messiah himself. In union with him the whole building is held together, and it is growing into a holy temple in union with the Lord. Yes, in union with him, you yourselves are being built together into a spiritual dwelling-place for God!”*

Now, let us look at 1 Peter 2:4-5 and 9-10 in which Peter speaks to the body of believers as a whole:

*“As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by people but chosen by God and precious to him, you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be cohanim set apart for God to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him through Yeshua the Messiah.” .... “But you are a chosen people, the King’s cohanim, a holy nation, a people for God to possess! Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; before, you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

I have read so many Scriptures to you that perhaps, by this time, you have lost track of what they have to do with the subject of this message which is “Passing on Our Heritage” to our children. So, I will review. The first point I want to leave with you is that all Jews have a covenant identity through Abraham that they are born into and that is passed on generationally, but which is spiritually incomplete until they come to know Yeshua. The second point I want to leave with you is that all of us who are believers in Yeshua—Jews and Gentiles alike—have a common covenant identity and heritage in the Lord through our faith, that God wants us to pass on to our children. It not only includes personal attributes such as love, faith, morality, and biblical knowledge, but it also includes our covenant responsibilities to (1) proclaim the Good News of Yeshua to all; (2) to serve others as there is a need and as we are led by the Holy Spirit; and (3) to pass the reality of our respective covenant identities and responsibilities down to our children as their heritage received from God through us. The final point I want to leave with you is that the surest way for us to pass on our God-given covenant heritage to our children is for us to live it out ourselves so that we are visible examples of godliness that our children can observe and emulate.

—CJB



## Tithes, Offerings, and Tz'dakah

*Delivered July 1, 2017*

Tithing first appears in the Bible when Abraham gives one-tenth of the increase of his wealth to Melchizedek; reading in [Genesis 14:18-20](#) (see also, [Hebrews 7:1-11](#)):

*“Malki-Tzedek king of Shalem brought out bread and wine. He was cohen of El ‘Elyon [God Most High], so he blessed him with these words: “Blessed be Avram by El ‘Elyon, maker of heaven of earth. and blessed be El ‘Elyon, who handed your enemies over to you.” Avram gave him a tenth of everything.”*

Tithing appears again in [Genesis 28:13-22](#), when God promises Jacob blessing and land, and Jacob, in turn, promises to return ten percent of that which he is given:

*“Then suddenly ADONAI was standing there next to him [Jacob]; and he said, “I am ADONAI, the God of Avraham your [grand]father and the God of Yitz’chak. The land on which you are lying I will give to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the grains of dust on the earth. You will expand to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. By you and your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed. Look, I am with you. I will guard you wherever you go, and I will bring you back into this land, because I won’t leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Ya’akov awoke from his sleep and said, “Truly, ADONAI is in this place—and I didn’t know it!” Then he became afraid and said, “This place is fearsome! This has to be the house of God! This is the gate of heaven!” Ya’akov got up early in the morning, took the stone he had put under his head, set it up as a standing-stone, poured olive oil on its top and named the place Beit-El [house of God]; but the town had originally been called Luz. Ya’akov took this vow: “If God will be with me and will guard me on this road that I am traveling, giving me bread to eat and clothes to wear, so that I return to my father’s house in peace, then ADONAI will be my God; and this stone, which I have set up as a standing-stone, will be God’s house; and of everything you give me, I will faithfully return one-tenth to you.””*

This was not, as some construe it, an attempt on Jacob’s part to bargain with God, but rather an expression of Jacob’s acceptance of the Covenant that had just been passed on to him and his acknowledgement that all things with which he would be blessed in fulfillment of that Covenant belonged to God.

The tithe appears again in [Numbers 18:20-25](#) as part of the Mosaic Law, in which the Israelites were commanded to give one-tenth of their increase (usually crops and animals) to sustain the Levites who had no inheritance of land:

*“ADONAI said to Aharon, “You are not to have any inheritance or portion in their land; I am your portion and inheritance among the people of Isra’el. To the descendants of Levi I have given the entire tenth of the produce collected in Isra’el. It is their inheritance in payment for the service they render in the tent of meeting. From now on, the people of Isra’el are not to approach the tent of meeting, so that they will not bear the consequences of their sin and die. Only the*

*L'vi'im are to perform the service in the tent of meeting, and they will be responsible for whatever they do wrong. This is to be a permanent regulation through all your generations. They are to have no inheritance among the people of Isra'el, because I have given to the L'vi'im as their inheritance the tenths of the produce which the people of Isra'el set aside as a gift for ADONAI. This is why I have said to them that they are to have no inheritance among the people of Isra'el."*

This giving of a tenth is referred to by Maimonides in his Positive Commandment #127 as the "first tithe." Maimonides also refers to a "second tithe" in his Positive Commandment #128 that is based on Deuteronomy 14:22-23, which required that once a year the Israelites were to eat, in the Tabernacle, from the one-tenth tithe of their crops and the firstborn of their domestic animals that were grown or raised during that year:

*"Every year you must take one tenth of everything your seed produces in the field, and eat it in the presence of ADONAI your God. In the place where he chooses to have his name live you will eat the tenth of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your cattle and sheep, so that you will learn to fear ADONAI your God always."*<sup>11</sup>

Then there is Maimonides' Positive Commandment #130 known as the "third tithe" or "poor tithe" that is based on Deuteronomy 14:28 which states:

*"At the end of every three years you are to take all the tenths of your produce from that year and store it in your towns."*

Presumably, each town had a storehouse wherein produce could be stored to sustain those among them who were poor.

Finally, there is Maimonides' Positive Commandment #129 or the "Levites' tithe," whereby the ordinary Levites were required to tithe to the *Cohanim* one-tenth of the one-tenth tithe that they received from the Israelites. This is based on Numbers 18:26, which states:

*"Tell the L'vi'im, 'When you take from the people of Isra'el the tenth of the produce which I have given you from them as your inheritance, you are to set aside from it a gift for ADONAI, one tenth of the tenth.'"*

Perhaps the most well-known Scripture about tithing is Malachi 3:10:

*"Bring the whole tenth into the storehouse, so that there will be food in my house, and put me to the test," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot. "See if I won't open for you the floodgates of heaven and pour out for you a blessing far beyond your needs."*

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<sup>11</sup> The translation seems to require that the entire one-tenth tithe be eaten in the Tabernacle. Clearly that is not possible, so the likely meaning is that a meal be eaten that is derived from components of the one-tenth tithe that was brought into the Tabernacle.

Offerings over and above tithes were used for other purposes. They were sometimes voluntary and sometimes not, but a percentage of income was not required for offerings as it was for tithes. The first offerings mentioned in the Bible were those of Kayin and Hevel (Cain and Abel) in Genesis 4:1-8:

*“The man had sexual relations with Havah his wife; she conceived, gave birth to Kayin [acquisition] and said, “I have acquired a man from ADONAI.” In addition she gave birth to his brother Hevel. Hevel kept sheep, while Kayin worked the soil. In the course of time Kayin brought an offering to ADONAI from the produce of the soil; and Hevel too brought from the firstborn of his sheep, including their fat. ADONAI accepted Hevel and his offering but did not accept Kayin and his offering. Kayin was very angry, and his face fell. ADONAI said to Kayin, “Why are you angry? Why so downcast? If you are doing what is good, shouldn’t you hold your head high? And if you don’t do what is good, sin is crouching at the door—it wants you, but you can rule over it.” Kayin had words with Hevel his brother; then one time, when they were in the field, Kayin turned on Hevel his brother and killed him.”*

There are many other examples of offerings in Scripture; here are four from the *Tanach*:

Exodus 25:1-2: *“ADONAI said to Moshe, “Tell the people of Isra’el to take up a collection for me—accept a contribution from anyone who wholeheartedly wants to give.”*

Exodus 30:13-14 (Maimonides P171): *“Everyone subject to the census is to pay as an offering to ADONAI half a shekel [one-fifth of an ounce of silver]—by the standard of the sanctuary shekel (a shekel equals twenty gerahs). Everyone over twenty years of age who is subject to the census is to give this offering to ADONAI”*

Deuteronomy 16:16-17: *“Three times a year all your men are to appear in the presence of ADONAI your God in the place which he will choose—at the festival of matzah, at the festival of Shavu’ot and at the festival of Sukkot. They are not to show up before ADONAI empty-handed, but every man is to give what he can, in accordance with the blessing ADONAI your God has given you.”*

Proverbs 3:9-10: *“Honor ADONAI with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your income. Then your granaries will be filled and your vats overflow with new wine.”*

Although tithing was still required until 70 A.D. when the Temple was destroyed, the New Covenant pattern of giving was mainly through freewill offerings. Here are some examples from the New Covenant Scriptures:

Luke 6:38: *“Give, and you will receive gifts—the full measure, compacted, shaken together and overflowing, will be put right in your lap. For the measure with which you measure out will be used to measure back to you!”*

Acts 20:35: *“In everything I have given you an example of how, by working hard like this, you must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Yeshua himself, ‘There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.’”*

1 Corinthians 16:1-2: “Now, in regard to the collection being made for God’s people: you are to do the same as I directed the congregations in Galatia to do. Every week, on Motza’ei-Shabbat, each of you should set some money aside, according to his resources, and save it up; so that when I come I won’t have to do fundraising.”

Finally, there is *tz’dakah* (charitable giving), which is giving to the poor and to good causes. Although not required, it was expected, and was considered a matter of moral justice and not mere benevolence; here are some examples from the *Tanach*:

Deuteronomy 15:7-11: “If someone among you is needy, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which ADONAI your God is giving you, you are not to harden your heart or shut your hand from giving to your needy brother. No, you must open your hand to him and lend him enough to meet his need and enable him to obtain what he wants. Guard yourself against allowing your heart to entertain the mean-spirited thought that because the seventh year, the year of *sh’mittah* is at hand, you would be stingy toward your needy brother and not give him anything; for then he may cry out to ADONAI against you, and it will be your sin. Rather, you must give to him; and you are not to be grudging when you give to him. If you do this, ADONAI your God will bless you in all your work, in everything you undertake—for there will always be poor people in the land. That is why I am giving you this order, ‘You must open your hand to your poor and needy brother in your land.’”

Proverbs 28:27: “He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who hides his eyes will get curses in plenty.”

And here are some examples of *tz’dakah* from the New Covenant Scriptures:

Matthew 6:1-4: “Be careful not to parade your acts of *tzedakah* in front of people in order to be seen by them! If you do, you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you do *tzedakah*, don’t announce it with trumpets to win people’s praise, like the hypocrites in the synagogues and on the streets. Yes! I tell you, they have their reward already! But you, when you do *tzedakah*, don’t even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Then your *tzedakah* will be in secret; and your Father, who sees what you do in secret, will reward you.”

Acts 20:35: “In everything I have given you an example of how, by working hard like this, you must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Yeshua himself, ‘There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.’”

Hebrews 13:16: “But don’t forget doing good and sharing with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

What survives of tithes, offerings, and *tz’dakah* in the New Covenant today are not requirements of law, but rather the principles of giving to God’s work in and through our institutions, and to individuals who are in need. One sometimes hears that tithing to one’s church or synagogue is biblically required, and that is not right. One also sometimes hears that tithing to one’s church or synagogue today is no longer appropriate, and that is not right either. The reason these seemingly

contradictory statements can be made is that, like many things of the Mosaic Law, certain of its principles find their way into the New Covenant, while the particulars of application and the enforcement mechanisms of the Mosaic Law do not.

There is no true comparison of our congregational sanctuaries today to that of the Tabernacle or Temple, except that our sanctuaries are today (as the Tabernacle and Temple were then) places where members of the community go periodically to meet God in prayer and worship, mediated by priests and a High Priest. In the Tabernacle, they were the Levitical priests and Aaron (the High Priest) and his sons, and now we (the priesthood of believers) are the priests, and Yeshua (our Messiah) is the High Priest. There is another similarity of “then and now” in that both institutions—the Tabernacle (later the Temple) and today’s synagogues—have expenses of upkeep. In Mosaic times the expenses included maintaining the Levites, and today it includes mortgage payments, rent, program costs, and the salaries of clergy and other employees.

Whereas tithes and offerings were prescribed by the Mosaic Law for maintaining the Temple and its priests, we have no such law today, but each institution (synagogue, apostolic network, etc.) prescribes the way(s) that its members agree to maintain it. In denominational synagogues, support is usually through membership fees and charging for High Holy Day seats, and in Christian churches and Messianic synagogues it is usually through members paying ten percent tithes on their income—an adaptation of the Mosaic Law. As for special offerings and *tz'dakah*, they are as needed today as in the past because membership fees and tithes cannot take care of such need and are not intended to. Messianic communities take up “freewill” offerings to cover such needs, and traditional Jewish communities teach that giving *tz'dakah* is a moral obligation.

—CJB

## Vision: Congregational and Personal

*Delivered March 19, 2016*

A member of our congregation recently asked me: “What is our congregation’s vision?” When I heard the question, I was momentarily at a loss to answer, and I thought: “What a strange question.” But then I recalled Proverbs 29:18, in which the King James Version states in part:

*“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”*

Could it be, I thought, that the member who asked the question was thinking that the King James translation’s use of the word “vision” was inferring that we as a congregation (and we personally) have to have a defined plan (like a five-year plan) for where we are headed? A goal for where we will be in the next year, five years, or ten years? I knew that that is not what the Scripture means because it is better paraphrased in the Complete Jewish Bible as:

*“Without a prophetic vision, the people throw off all restraint;”*

And, in fact, the rest of the verse, not often quoted, says:

*“but he who keeps Torah is happy.”*

I thought about it quite a lot since that conversation and wondered: Do all of our members know why they are here? We come together to pray every *Shabbat* and every Holy Day, but is there more to our congregational life than that?

Our web site states:

*“We are a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for Gentile believers called to serve Messiah alongside their Jewish brethren.”*

What exactly that means, and what the full scope of it is, are what I want to speak about today.

To begin with, we are (as are all biblically established congregations) a family. Most families are comprised of husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters; and we are as well. I am not speaking of the natural families among us, but rather our congregational family itself. We have a father; He is our Father in Heaven, and He is the leader of our family. And we have children—not only the youngsters who attend, but all of us. We are all God’s children, and that makes us brothers and sisters to each other. But what about husbands and wives? Well, Scripture tells us that God is not only the Father of us as individuals, but He is the husband of us corporately. In Isaiah 54:5 we read:

*“For your husband is your Maker, ADONAI-Tzva’ot is his name.”*

And we read in Hosea 2:18a referring to Israel:

*“On that day,” says ADONAI “you will call me Ishi [My Husband]...”*

Now imagine yourself returning home today and asking your husband or your wife or your father or your mother: “What is the vision of our family?” You are likely to be met with a blank stare and a question like: “What do you mean by that? We are a family and our vision is to stay that way.” Still, there is something deeper that could be said, that has to do with Proverbs 29:18 and also with our congregation’s statement of purpose.

Like all families, we are a protective and nurturing unit and, like our natural families, we have a family head (under God) that is our congregational leader assisted by elders. And like our natural families, each member has (or should have) specially assigned duties. Yes, even congregations have to take out the garbage, but there are other assigned duties as well, such as manning the office; setting up chairs for the *Shabbat* service; serving meals—the *Shulchan Adonai* and the *Oneg Shabbat* for example. Also, participating in worship, leading liturgy, reading Scripture, etc.

And there are non-assigned duties in most families such as bandaging and praying over boo-boos (here we call it pastoral care or counseling). And there is seeing to the children’s upbringing and education (here we call it discipleship and education).

“Ahh,” says one of our teen-age members (thinking he has got me), “your analogy to the natural family breaks down in that the congregational family does not bear children.” “*Au contraire*,” I say to him (I throw in a little French to impress him). “We do bear children if we are obedient to Yeshua’s instructions to his disciples in Matthew 28:19, where he says:

*“Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, [disciples] immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh,”*

Making disciples from unbelievers is like bearing children because it gives them life. John 3:16 says of Yeshua’s disciples that:

*“...everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life...”*

And Yeshua said to Nicodemus in John 3:3-6:

*“I tell you that unless a person is born again from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.’ Nakdimon [Nicodemus] said to him, “How can a grown man be ‘born’? Can he go back into his mother’s womb and be born a second time?” Yeshua answered, “Yes, indeed, I tell you that unless a person is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. What is born from the flesh is flesh, and what is born from the Spirit is spirit.”*

Also, in 1 Peter 1:23 we read:

*“You have been born again not from some seed that will decay, but from one that cannot decay, through the living Word of God that lasts forever.”*

So, by our congregation seeking to make disciples of Yeshua among both Jews and non-Jews, we do bear children because we lead those who will receive the truth of Yeshua, from a life that has an end to a newly born life with God that is eternal. So, do we have a corporate vision? I think of us as having a vision to improve as a family of Messianic believers—not a vision for becoming something in the future that we are not at the present. And as a family, we rely upon Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit to guide us in bring up our children—God’s children—who are all of us that have chosen to make this our congregation. The statement on our web site says that we are “a home,” and that is exactly what we are.

Now that does not mean that we have no aspirations to expand and grow—to add new members, enlarge our facilities and increase our ministry capabilities. We certainly do have those desires. So, since as a family we want to improve, let us explore how we can do that.

To begin with, the dynamics within all successful families are that parents are charged with bring up their children, and children are charged with honoring their parents and obeying them. To parents, Proverbs 22:6 says:

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

And Ephesians 6:4 says:

*“Fathers, don’t irritate your children and make them resentful; instead, raise them with the Lord’s kind of discipline and guidance.”*

Those are the responsibilities of parents, but children have their responsibilities as well. Most important, they are charged with respecting, obeying, and honoring their parents, for we read in Ephesians 6:1-2:

*“Children, what you should do in union with the Lord is obey your parents, for this is right. Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment that embodies a promise—“*

And in Colossians 3:20 we read:

*“Children, obey your parents in everything; for this pleases the Lord.”*

But we are speaking here about congregations, so how do these natural family responsibilities translate to congregational family responsibilities? Well, as to a congregation’s fathers (its leaders), we read in Acts 20:28-29:

*“Watch out for yourselves, and for all the flock in which the Ruach HaKodesh has placed you as leaders, to shepherd God’s Messianic community, which he won for himself at the cost of his own*



*Son's blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you; and they won't spare the flock."*

And in 1Peter 5:1-3 we read:

*"Therefore, I urge the congregation leaders among you, as a fellow-leader and witness to the Messiah's sufferings, as well as a sharer in the glory to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is in your care, exercising oversight not out of constraint, but willingly, as God wants; and not out of a desire for dishonest gain, but with enthusiasm; also not as machers [i.e. movers and shakers] domineering over those in your care, but as people who become examples to the flock."*

So, congregational fathers (elders and pastors) are responsible for protecting the congregation's children (who are its members), and also for leading them in godliness and for providing oversight. And, in the same way as children in natural families have responsibilities to their parents, so do a congregation's children (who are its members) to their congregational parents, for Hebrews 13:7 says:

*"Remember your leaders, those who spoke God's message to you. Reflect on the results of their way of life, and imitate their trust-"*

And Hebrews 13:17 follows up with:

*"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your lives, as people who will have to render an account. So make it a task of joy for them, not one of groaning; for that is of no advantage to you."*

But there is more. You recall that Proverbs 22:6 says to natural parents:

*"Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it."*

Well, it applies as well to congregational parents and congregational children, for we read in Ephesians 4:11-14:

*"Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. "Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, until we all arrive at the unity implied by trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of maturity set by the Messiah's perfection. We will then no longer be infants tossed about by the waves and blown along by every wind of teaching, at the mercy of people clever in devising ways to deceive.*

*"We will then no longer be infants,"* so part of congregational family life involves growing up in the Lord, and our pastoral leaders have been put here to equip us for adulthood. Borrowing from the United States Army's motto, God wants us to "be all that we can be," and our congregational leaders want to help us be just that.

I began this message by a congregant asking me: “What is our vision?” Well, according to the Scriptures we have just read, the question should rather have been directed to each member, and each member should be asking him or herself: “What is my vision for where God wants me to be in the future?” Our family is here to help us receive and clarify our respective visions and to help us achieve them. However, if we want our congregation’s help, we have to make our desires known.

Do we want to learn more about the Scriptures? Part of what we have to offer are our weekly messages, our *beit midrash* teachings, and the teachings given in our mid-week *chavurot*. But we have other things to offer as well, such as personal mentoring and formal coursework for which any of us can sign up online at a variety of schools—some free and some not free. Perhaps we are troubled about something or are going through a difficult season in our lives. We have trained counselors among our leaders who can help us or can refer us to outside counselors. Perhaps there is an area in which we would like to serve but have not been asked. If we make our desire known, we can receive training. Perhaps we have encountered an emergency and need financial help. We maintain a modest fund for just such a purpose, and we have financial experts among us who can guide us in budgeting and in other fiscal skills. These are things that our congregation can do for us! But borrowing from our former national rabbi John F. Kennedy (please forgive the poetic license): “*Ask not what others can give to us, but what we can give to others.*”

Ephesians 4:12 that I previously read to you concerning our leaders, states:

*“Their [gifted ministers] task is to equip God’s people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah,”*

And that brings me to the last part of my message, but a part that is extremely important because it has to do with what God would have us give after we receive. Reading from Matthew 28, verses 16-20:

*“So the eleven talmidim [disciples] went to the hill in the Galil where Yeshua had told them to go. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some hesitated. Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim [disciples], immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age.”*

We can see by this Scripture that if we are disciples of Yeshua, the work of an evangelist and of a discipler of others is ours so, each of us must ask our self: “Does the vision I believe I have for myself include ministering to others?” If it does not, the vision is not the one that God gave and we need to seek him for the correct one. From time to time, our congregation will conduct outreach events, but the main responsibility for reaching out to others—for bringing unbelievers into the fold and starting them on a path of discipleship—that responsibility lies at our feet as individual members.

—CJB

## Welcoming the *Ruach HaKodesh* in Jewish Space

*Delivered August 1, 2009*

There are indications that Messianic Judaism has developed a new consciousness and desire for the *Ruach HaKodesh*. In fact, the UMJC's decision to have this seminar is one of those indications, and another is that it has come close on the heels of Tikkun's recent conference in Pennsylvania, where the *Ruach HaKodesh* fell in power among many of us—especially among our youth. A coincidence? I do not think so.

Tikkun thinks of its space as “Jewish,” not very different from UMJC “Jewish Space,” but when the *Ruach* fell at the Tikkun conference, the behavior of many who were gathered looked more Pentecostal than Jewish. People were falling, laying face-down on the floor, speaking in tongues for the first time, and like that. It certainly did not look like Jewish Space to me but, then again, how would I know since there is no counterpart to this experience within modern Judaism? I say “modern” Judaism because the *Ruach HaKodesh* was given in power to assembled Jews on *Shavuot* about two thousand years ago ([Acts 2:1-4; 8:14-17](#)), and there was plenty about it that did not look Jewish even then. Historically, majority Judaism did not acknowledge the New Covenant that brought universal access to the *Ruach*, and eventually Christianity picked it up, put their own cultural spin on it, and claimed it as their own. But Holy Spirit ministry was originally Jewish and should therefore be considered Jewish today; the fact is, Christianity got it from us.

Let me share some impressions I had when the *Ruach Hakodesh* visited the Tikkun conference. As I looked over the hundreds of worshipers, I noted three kinds of behaviors. There were those who were in prayer and quiet meditative worship; that looked Jewish. There were others who were exhibiting emotion and excitement; that did not look very Jewish. Then there was a third group of persons who were looking around trying to figure out what to make of it all.

Years ago, I was among those who were easily distracted by exhibitions of emotion during Holy Spirit ministry. I suspected it as being mostly of the flesh, and it sure did not look Jewish. I was right about some of it being of the flesh because occasionally, people admitted to me that some of their behaviors were “put on” as a result of pressures they felt to conform to community expectations. However, over time, I observed another thing, and that was that some of those whom I saw acting strangely, seemed to accelerate in their spiritual development soon after the ministries. Some received spiritual gifts they did not previously have, and some matured in [Galatians 5:22-23](#) fruit of the Spirit “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” The last of the listed fruit of the Spirit is self-control, and I am freely telling you that these spiritual advances happened immediately after ministry events that appeared to lack self-control.

Nevertheless, I could not deny the good fruit that seemed to have come from those “Holy Spirit” ministries and, although I did not understand them and was still uncomfortable with them as being emotional and non-Jewish, I had to admit that God was in them and using them for good. I eventually developed a theory of why “Holy Spirit” ministry and emotion so often seemed to go together, and I will tell you what that theory is.

First, God who created the world is so powerful that we humans cannot even stand up in the shadow of his presence. Although we ought not to intentionally lose control of ourselves, it is easy to do when we are in the presence of such power so that accounts for part of the emotion. The other part is that many of us are normally so self-controlled in our way of being and in our daily walk with God that, without meaning to, we hold back on releasing control to God even when we are in his awesome presence. Jews are taught from before *Bar Mitzvah* age how to *daven*, but we are not generally taught that it is okay to feel excited in God's presence. Anyway, in order to break through, God meets us with power during times of ministry when we become willing, "ever-so-slightly," to open ourselves to him by letting go of some of our conventional and cultural inhibitions. When we do that, the combination of God's power and our openness to it produces an emotional release that surprises even us.

Now there is an important caveat to this that I would be remiss if I did not mention:

*It is important that we do not judge God's presence or the fruit of his ministry by the feelings or emotions we observe or experience.*

There are manifestations of the flesh that can mimic manifestations of the *Ruach HaKodesh*, so after what has seemed to be a powerful move of the *Ruach* upon us, we should ask ourselves probing questions such as:

1. During or afterwards, have we repented of any life-dominating sins to which we were previously in bondage?
2. Have we let go of some of our flesh, put off our old man and put on the new man of the *Ruach* (Ephesians 4:22-24)?
3. Have we received *Ruach HaKodesh* gifts that we did not previously have? Discerning of Spirits? Healing? Prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)?
4. Have we acquired more of the Fruit of the *Ruach* (Galatians 5:22-23)?

The answers to these questions will tell the story of whether what we experienced was the Spirit or the flesh.

The title of this message is "Welcoming the *Ruach HaKodesh* in Jewish Space." Stop and think about it for a minute; isn't that a strange title? It infers that the *Ruach HaKodesh* is not already in Jewish Space—that is why we have to invite him. The fact is, the *Ruach HaKodesh* has been in Jewish Space for as long as there have been Jews. He was active among the Israelites during the time of Moses and before, and his coming to dwell in all who would receive him was prophesied to the Houses of Israel and Judah as part of the New Covenant that God would eventually make with the Jewish people (Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34)). Centuries later, Jeremiah's prophecy came to pass when the *Ruach HaKodesh* fell upon Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem during *Shavuot*. So, biblically and historically, the *Ruach HaKodesh* has had a large role in defining Jewish Space in that whatever space he occupies together with Jews is, in fact, Jewish Space. For that reason, if our concept of

Jewish Space does not include the *Ruach* in a major way, there is a serious problem in our understanding.

I do not mean to infer that traditional Jewish culture is unimportant. What I am saying is that any attempt at defining “Jewish Space” that does not make place for the *Ruach* is incomplete. It is not God’s will that we take it upon ourselves to establish a Jewish Space without the Holy Spirit’s participation. It would be like a committee of us building a Tabernacle that we call “Jewish Space” and then asking God if he would like to live there. It is backwards thinking. If we want the *Ruach HaKodesh* to dwell among us, HE has to tell US what Jewish Space is.

It should be obvious that if we want the *Ruach*’s presence, our Jewish Space cannot be a copy of the wider Jewish Community that does yet possess New Covenant understanding. I am NOT suggesting that we NOT try to build a Jewish Space for ourselves with which we are comfortable, but I am suggesting that we have to be open to changing our understanding of Jewish Space once we know what the *Ruach* wants. I think some of us believe that Messianic Jewish Space should be the same as exists in the wider Jewish community. It is the Jewish Space of our youth—the space that gives us warm fuzzies and a sense of belonging. The problem is that it is also the Jewish Space that has rejected Yeshua, the *Ruach HaKodesh*, and the New Covenant.

Despite that, some of us have resisted establishing our Jewish Space in a way that would better accommodate New Covenant realities because we have not wanted to be seen as inauthentic by the wider Jewish community. We have sometimes defended this as necessary for Jewish outreach, and there is some truth to it. But I also think that some of our motives have been from fear of being rejected by the Jewish community, and from pursuing comfort for ourselves through what we find familiar and pleasing. Nevertheless, if we are serious about inviting the *Ruach HaKodesh* into our Jewish Space, we are going to have to be willing to change some things about it, and this very likely means having to bear some criticism of our Jewish authenticity.

I do not exactly know what *Ruach*-friendly Jewish Space should look like, and I am guessing that none of you do either because God has not fully revealed it to us. But I am sure of some things about it, so allow me to share what I do know.

First, *Ruach*-friendly Jewish Space must accommodate our understanding of *Torah* and its application in the New Covenant age as being through the *Ruach HaKodesh*. We accept every word of the *Torah* as true, but without the *Ruach*, we cannot know how to apply most of it, and that is the case for both Jews and non-Jews alike. So, we must change our emphasis from being “Messiah and *Torah*-centered” to being “Messiah, *Torah*, and *Ruach*-centered.”

Second, we should recognize that much of our Jewish Space is already *Ruach*-friendly. Bible learning, connecting to our Jewish people and to Israel—these are all *Ruach*-friendly. What is not *Ruach*-friendly is any inflexibility on our part that dissuades us from consulting the *Ruach* or being submissive to the *Ruach* if he wants to change our direction, albeit in the midst of a service or at other times.

Now a word about Jewish prayer: Jewish prayer is largely liturgical, and the nature of liturgy is that it is structured and ordered. Jewish liturgy is, for the most-part beautiful, biblical, and completely consistent with New Covenant realities, but we must also realize that it is devoid of overt New Covenant content because it was developed over time by a Judaism that did not believe in (and in fact was hostile to) Yeshua. That does not make Jewish liturgy bad but it makes it incomplete, so we must be willing to change it where needed by adding New Covenant content. I believe that any Messianic Jewish congregation that does not do it cannot expect the *Ruach* to be powerfully present in its services. Can the *Ruach* crash through and be there of his own accord? Of course. But that is different from our inviting him.

Although we are using terms like “inviting him,” the *Ruach HaKodesh* is not like any other invited guest who sits in a pew and follows along. On the contrary, when we invite him, we invite him to lead us; he becomes our Rabbi and *Gabbai* rolled into one. When we discern his presence, we need to back off and listen. Does he want us to go this way or that way? Does he want to re-order our service or proceed as usual? And we ought to query ourselves: Will we refuse if he directs us to skip the *Amidah* for that day and, in its place, fall on our faces in pure solitary worship? Will we *plotz* if he directs someone to stand up and prophesy? Will we double-*plotz* if the prophecy is in tongues? Welcoming the *Ruach* requires desiring his leadership and not trying to maintain a certain kind of service.

I think I have been clear but let me put it another way through a question. If the *Ruach HaKodesh* shows up, will we know what to do with him? How to treat him? I am reminded of the cup of Eliyahu on our *seder* tables and how we open the door, displaying our desire to receive him because he signals Messiah’s return. But what if Eliyahu really shows up one *Pesach*? Would we just go on reading from the *Haggadah* as though he were not in our midst? Well, it is the same with the *Ruach HaKodesh*. We need to begin each service by inviting him, expecting him, and being ready to change things if he so directs.

Up to now, I have spoken about only one place of Jewish Space—our congregational services. Actually, there is a more foundational place where Jewish Space should exist, and that is in our homes and, according to the *Sh’ma*, everywhere we happen to be as we “*walk by the way*.” It is unrealistic to think that we will experience the *Ruach HaKodesh* in congregational Jewish Space if we do not also experience him in our private space, because he comes for us—not to experience a service. That means that each of us needs to be *Ruach*-thirsty—seeking to commune with him continually.

I recall when I first encountered [Genesis 5:24](#):

“*And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.*”

It impacted me, and there and then I said to God and to myself: “That’s what I want my relationship with God to be.” That brings me to something I must say to you, and that is that your level of personal holiness will determine how close God will allow you to get to him, and how close the *Ruach HaKodesh* will allow himself to get to you ([2 Corinthians 7:1](#); [1 Peter 1:16](#)). “*And Enoch walked with God*” is not a recreational statement; it is a statement of closeness between Enoch and God, and of Enoch’s level of holiness. Another way to say it is this: If you want to experience the *Ruach HaKodesh*, you do not make an appointment with him between 2 and 3 in the afternoon. You

seek to walk with him as “*Enoch walked with God*,” living an obedient and repentant life, and with your ears tuned to his voice. Yeshua said this in Revelation 3:20:

“*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*”

John heard that from Yeshua in heaven, so it is Yeshua’s invitation for the *Ruach HaKodesh* to come to us here on earth if he is asked. But the asking has to be God’s way—not ours, so the asking has to be accompanied by repentance, and a desire to walk with God.

Back to the title of this message: “Welcoming the *Ruach HaKodesh* in Jewish Space.” It had almost slipped by me, but we had better ask ourselves if we really want that. Have you heard the expression: “Beware or you may get what you wish for?” Perhaps you recall what happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the *Ruach HaKodesh*? I am not suggesting that anyone here plans to follow their example, but I am saying that the presence of the *Ruach HaKodesh* is serious business and nothing to trifle with. We ought not to think of him as merely a comforter, although Scripture describes him that way. Also, we ought not to think of him as merely a provider of gifts, although Scripture describes him that way also. What I am warning about is inviting him into our space before we are sure that our hearts are ready to receive him. If we are not ready, it would be better for us to pray for mercy at times when he does make his appearance.

Let me conclude this way. We may not understand it, but we sense the reality of “Jewish Space” and we are trying to determine how best to invite the *Ruach HaKodesh* into it. The major points are these: (1) If we want to experience the *Ruach HaKodesh* in Jewish Space, we need to first ask him what he thinks Jewish Space is; if we find it is not what we had in mind, we must nevertheless be prepared to agree to however he directs us; (2) As a corollary to point number (1), we must be prepared to bear any criticism of us that comes from the wider Jewish community that calls our resulting Jewish Space inauthentic; (3) we must turn our focus to holiness, obedience, and reliance on the *Ruach HaKodesh* to help us interpret Scripture and show us how it applies in our lives; (4) We must repent of any inflexibility we have in the ways we conduct our personal and congregational affairs because when the *Ruach HaKodesh* comes, he comes to take charge—not just to visit; and (5) We must desire him with a submissive heart, wanting to be like Enoch who walked with God.

I thank God for giving me this message, and I pray that it will be heard by those who most need to hear it.

—CJB

## Why Jewish Identity Is Important

*Delivered November 12, 2010*

I will begin by asking a question: “When is our Jewish identity important?” No, let me rephrase that because there is nothing God has given us that is unimportant. So, perhaps a better question is: “When is our Jewish identity most important?” And now I will answer my own question: “It is most important when it is being used to serve God’s purposes and least important when it is being used to serve our own purposes. This is not only true of Jewish identity, but of any identity that God has given us; however, this being a Jewish congregation, I will talk about Jewish identity and let those of us who are not Jewish, interpret accordingly.

I think we can learn something about this subject from the *shaliach* Sha’ul (the apostle Paul) as we read in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22:

*“... and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Messiah), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”*

Paul has been criticized for taking this position because, to some it seems like he is making little of his Jewish identity and merely using it as an expedient to preach the Gospel. A chameleon of sorts. A Jew one day and a Greek the next. From other biblical accounts we know that Paul took his Jewish identity very seriously, but here his situation was indeed one of wanting to get Gospel truth across to those to whom he was preaching. Presumably, when being a Jew was relevant to the conversation at hand he spoke as a Jew would speak, when he deemed it not relevant or minimally relevant, he changed his way of speaking. The biblical principal Paul was using is recorded in Philippians 2:3-4:

*“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

What made the deciding difference for Paul on how he held himself out to others was what he knew God wanted him to accomplish at that moment. Paul took his own feelings about his identity out of the situation as being unimportant compared to his mission and the other person’s needs.

There is an occasion in Scripture that comes to mind when, in order to make his point, Paul emphasized his Jewish identity as being very important; we read in Philippians 3:4-6:

*“... though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”*



Now my reason for this message is not to dwell on Paul, but on we who are presumably called here by God to participate as Messianic Jews and Gentile affiliates of the wider Jewish community. Paul's example is instructive to us because, just as it was with him, our lives have components of both mission and identity, and they are not unrelated. Our special mission derives from our identity as Jews, an identity that was created by the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—an identity that carried with it a calling to be a nation of priests to the world. And when, in history, the mainstream of Israel rejected its Messiah but a remnant believed, it fell to those of us who now call ourselves Messianic, to add an additional function to our priesthood to the nations, which is to serve our own Jewish people. Those responsibilities are our mission, and they derive from our identities as Jews and *K'rovei Yisrael* (Gentiles closely connected to the Jewish people).

But using Paul as an example has its limitations because Paul's world is not our world, and that is where the Holy Spirit has to give us understanding on how to close the gap. No one in Paul's day accused him of being a *goy*. A misguided Jew yes, a cultic Jew yes, but a Jew nonetheless because, at the time of Paul and before, no one thought it even possible that a *Torah-observant* Jew could become a *goy* merely by proclaiming an unpopular Messiah. Paul himself argued in Acts 24:14:

*“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.”*

And also Acts 18:4-6:

*“And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Yeshua is the Messiah. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*

That is not the case today when Jewish opponents of Yeshua try to discredit us who are his Jewish messengers by doing everything possible to convince the wider Jewish community that we are no longer Jews. You notice that Paul was at least heard out before his message was rejected, but we Messianic Jews of the twenty-first century hardly ever even get the hearing Paul got; to even be listened to, we have to first establish our right to speak as Jews.

I do not think Paul thought about his identity very much because it was not his main challenge the way it is for us. The few accounts of it that we read in Scripture may, for all we know, be the only occasions of it but for us, our Jewish identity is of major importance.

Perhaps I am talking too much about our congregation's need to be perceived as Jewish and for urging certain ways of speaking, dressing, and behaving, that creates an atmosphere of Jewish comfort. There are many “flavors” in the wider Jewish world that range from ultra-orthodox, to secular atheists, to Jewish disciples of Sun Yat Moon; and so, what may be comfortable about our community to one group may be a put-off to another. There is, however, a common consensus (at least in a given geographic area) as to what “feels Jewish” to a Jew, and what does not. This is very hard to explain, but even a non-Jew can be accepted as part of a Jewish community if he or she exhibits cultural behaviors that say: “I belong here,” whereas a Yeshiva-trained rabbi who refers to

God with words like “my Lord” will set off alarm bells! It is a pretty subtle thing and has little to do with theology; it is culture.

I got a chance to think more deeply about this recently when, by chance, I used “*HaShem*” in a Messianic-related document and was asked: “why do you use ‘*HaShem*’ instead of ‘the Lord?’” I replied this way:

“Both ways of referring to the Lord have become part of my everyday speech and are comfortable for me. However, I have recently become more aware of how some of my comfortable and familiar expressions sound foreign to the local Jewish way of speaking. For example, I would not refer to God as “the Lord” when speaking to a clerk of a Jewish bookstore because, in their world, people do not commonly use the words “the Lord” in conversations. There is no offense here. It is that it is an expression that labels the speaker as “not part of the Jewish community—at least the part with which I am familiar. A Messianic Jew who uses it regularly in Messianic contexts and does not hob-knob in the Jewish community from time to time might be surprised by this, because the words “the Lord” are so common in Scripture and in Jewish liturgy. The fact is, I have spent so little recent time in the general Jewish community that I have lost some of the nuances of Jewish speech and have, instead, picked up a Christian-style of speech that labels who I am without my realizing it. It is not that I am ashamed of who I am as a Messianic Jew or that I want to hide it. It is that I am also a Jew in the Jewish community and need to be perceived as that as well.”

Then, another person who was party to the discussion asked me why it was so important to me to be perceived as Jewish. “Isn’t it sufficient to be understood,” he asked? My answer was that it does not always matter, but sometimes it does. To go back to the Jewish bookstore example, I had been purchasing books for Beth Messiah and Ahavat Yeshua from one of them for several years and, one day, the owner told me he would no longer give me his usual congregational and church discount because he decided that, by my calling my congregations Messianic Jewish (using the designation “Jewish”), we were misleading and deceiving the Jewish community. Make note of the fact that he allowed the discount to all kinds of Christian churches, but would no longer allow it to my congregations because, in his opinion, we said that we were Jewish and, according to his understanding, we were not. I accepted his decision without argument and considered it one of good character on his part because he was acting on principle and risking the loss of my business; nevertheless, I continued to patronize the store for years even though I could buy the books I needed elsewhere for less. Not only did I patronize the store, but I periodically asked the owner and his son (an ordained rabbi and *Torah* scribe) scholarly and sometimes challenging questions on Jewish subjects that I genuinely needed to know about—especially subjects pertaining to Jewish concepts of Messiah—and I bought quite a few of their “anti-missionary” books with titles like “You Take Jesus, I’ll Take God.” To show respect as a Jew to a Jew, I always tried to remember to put on my *kippah* when I went into the bookstore, and I sincerely enjoyed trying out my childhood memory of Yiddish expressions in our various conversations. I also introduced them to my two sons David and Brian, they became customers as well and, over time, familiarity among us grew to the point that the owner’s son followed David’s theological education all through his years at Gordon Conwell and Cambridge University. Then, one day when the owner’s son (who knew about the discount situation) checked me out at the cash register, he rang up the discount. I thought he had made an error, so I

pointed it out to him, but he just waived his hand at me that it was okay; after that, I received the discount from both the son and the father.

The way I see it is that, over time, my demeanor, my way of comporting myself, and my scholarly questions (not my theology) convinced them that I was Jewish, not deceptive, and therefore the Messianic Jewish congregations with which I was affiliated must therefore also be Jewish. In the end, it just did not make sense to them that someone who was so obviously Jewish was not Jewish. This story is not unimportant because every rabbi and every cantor from every synagogue in the Washington Metropolitan Area, as well as every Jew that has a shelf of Jewish books, eventually finds his way to that bookstore and may have their opinion of us influenced by a casually uttered word of acceptance from one of the store owners or employees.

I believe that many of in the Messianic Jewish movement, especially Jewish members who did not have a Jewish upbringing, do not have enough of a feel for what being and sounding Jewish is like. We're doing pretty well learning about Jewish things and conducting Jewish services, but we are weak in our one-on-one relational skills and the more subtle things that show up in conversations and add to "Jewish space." What is "Jewish space," you ask? It is an environment of cultural Jewish comfort. If you were brought up culturally Jewish on any level, you know it when you're in it, and the only way to achieve it later in life is to spend considerable time with Jews and participate in significant ways in the Jewish Community. Most of us have not done so for various reasons that range from "no time," to "fear of rejection," and there was also an effort among some of the Hebrew Christian and Messianic Jewish leaders in the last century to discourage their members from participating in the wider Jewish Community for fear of their being lured away from their faith in Yeshua. It was a time when anti-missionary organizations (e.g. Jews for Judaism) were in their heyday and, the fact is, some Messianic Jews did succumb and leave the faith. But our understanding has grown since then, and we no longer see it as God's will that we keep to ourselves aloof and separate from the rest of the Jewish Community. We now understand that to do so denies our shared heritage and responsibility to fulfill the Covenant given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that joins all Jews in the world as a people.

So, with renewed zeal, I want to encourage all of us who are not already doing so, to find a way to spend some time in the wider Jewish community to absorb and learn and, as opportunities arise, to serve. We can join the Jewish Community Centers to exercise, to dance, to take courses, attend lectures, or just schmooze. There are other Jewish organizations to consider as well (especially benevolence and service organizations), and we can attend occasional *Shabbat* and Festival services at one of the numerous synagogues in our area and get to know their members.

I am just about finished now except for one thing, and that is to help you to see that both "mission" and "identity" are foundationally Jewish because both can be traced to the Abrahamic Covenant. The identity part comes from God creating the Jewish people by separating out Abraham's family through Isaac and Jacob (later called Israel), and the mission part comes from the reason God created the Jewish people which was to be a kingdom of priests to the nations of the world. Tragically, Israel lost its sense of mission over the centuries, so that today many Jews dwell more on their culture and identity as Jews than on their mission of world leadership that is meant to go hand-in-hand with it.

—NKJ



# **D. Messianic Jewish Theology**

## **Sermons • Vol 1**



## The Besorah from a Jewish Perspective

*Delivered February 27, 2010*

During Tikkun’s recent American Executive Team meeting, one of the leaders began to explain about his congregation’s emphasis on sharing the *Besorah* (that is, the “Gospel”—the “Good News”). I was sure I did not need to hear another exhortation about sharing the Gospel with the Jewish people; what I needed was a way to get Jewish people to sit still long enough to hear it! My memory flitted to the various times when guest speakers at my congregations taught about the importance of preaching the Gospel and I, for one, did not need convincing.

But not wanting to be rude, I listened. He started off in the usual way by reminding us that, despite resistance and rejection, the Gospel is good for people and it is our responsibility to preach it. But then he said something that caught my attention. He said that he had begun to train his congregants on how to explain the Gospel to others. “Wait a minute,” I thought. Don’t we all know what the Gospel is and how to explain it? I remember that the last guest speaker on the subject gave us some instruction on how to prepare a short and long version of our individual testimonies and explanations of how we respond to hearing the Gospel when its message impacts us for the first time. He talked about seizing upon serendipitous social encounters for sharing, and even some ways to plan events and occasions where sharing might be slipped in. But come to think of it, we did not talk about how to share the Gospel itself—its content—its significance. What words would we use to explain it? We did not go into that.

I remember that in my early experience in Messianic Judaism the singular approach to sharing the Gospel seemed to be the presentation of John 3:16. Evangelistic conversations went something like this:

**Q:** “Hi there! Do you know that Jesus loves you?”

**A:** “Yeh, so what?”

**Q:** “The Bible says: *‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’ Don’t you want to be saved?’*”

**A:** “Saved? What’s that?”

**Q:** “It means not going to Hell! You don’t want to go there, do you?”

**A:** “HELL NO!”

**Q:** “Well then, all you have to do is follow along as I read these “Four Jewish Laws” and pray a simple prayer that’s on the last page.”

**A:** “The Four Jewish Laws? I never heard of them. What do they say?”

**Q:** “Here’s a copy that Sid Roth sent me. We can read them together and you can sign the prayer at the end.”

**A:** “You’re not explaining this very well. I am not signing anything until I get some questions answered. Like suppose I pray the prayer; what then?”

**Q:** “Well, then you’re saved.”

**A:** “You mean God does not care what I do after that? I am saved and that’s that?”

**Q:** “Oh, God probably cares, but if you pray the prayer, you have a kind of life-insurance policy. Once you’re saved, you’re always saved.”

**A:** “But what about God’s commandments? Can I go out then and kill someone? Can I commit adultery just because I prayed the prayer?”

**Q:** Well, now we’re getting a little over my head. All I know is that the law was done away with when Jesus died on the cross, and we’re saved by grace.

**A:** That does not make any sense to me.

**Q:** “I don’t really know much more than I told you, but my rabbi said if I run into any trouble explaining it, I can refer the person to him. Would you like me to arrange a meeting between you and him?”

**A:** “Uh, no. Maybe some time.”

**Q:** “Okay, but remember, you’re on your way to Hell until you pray the prayer. And who knows but you might die in an automobile accident in the next few minutes, and then where will you be? Why don’t you just pray the prayer and think it over later?”

I have stated this a bit stereotypically but, for the most part, that was the level of understanding we had in those days when we were sent out to knock on neighbors’ doors and offer salvation tracts to Metro riders. But the shocking thing that came to me as I heard the leader at the Tikkun meeting speak was that I could not remember one instance outside of my formal coursework when a congregational leader sat down with me and made sure that I knew how to explain the Gospel message in depth.

But my revelation did not end there. When I began to prepare this message I realized that nowadays when I explain the Gospel (and let us start calling it by its Hebrew designation *Besorah*), heaven and hell and eternal life are barely a part of what I talk about anymore and, instead of my beginning with [John 3:16](#), Yeshua does not generally make his appearance in my explanation until toward the end. It is very different now from how I used to explain it. And then as if to answer a question I had barely yet formulated, the words of [Galatians 3:8](#) came to mind:

*“Also the Tanakh, foreseeing that God would consider the Gentiles righteous when they live by trusting and being faithful, told the Good News to Abraham in advance by saying, “In connection with you, all the Goyim will be blessed.” (CBJ)*

What might God have included while explaining the *Besorah* to Abraham? It was not [John 3:16](#) of course, and I doubt that God used an advanced copy of the “Four Jewish Laws.” He may have not even mentioned Yeshua by name. Logic persuades me that God began with the facts surrounding creation that years later were recorded in the Book of Genesis. He explained the fall and spiritual demise of mankind that resulted from Adam’s sin and how He was planning to redeem mankind from its sentence of death in stages through several covenants, beginning with the one He was



making with Abraham. He would then tell of a future man named Moses, during whose lifetime God would make Israel into a nation of priests, and finally God would tell Abraham of a New Covenant that He would make with the house of Israel and Judah that He would accomplish through the blood sacrifice of one of Israel's sons who was also God's only begotten son. That full explanation is what I believe was the Gospel—the Good News—the *Besorah*—that was revealed to Abraham.

And why not? In his Gospel, does not John also begin at the beginning?

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:1-5 NKJ)*

The *Besorah* is the same for both Jew and Gentile, but the Jewish way of explaining it does not isolate Yeshua and the New Covenant from the rest of salvation history and from its Jewish past. So yes, I do believe we need instruction and practice in explaining the *Besorah* because, as Messianic Jews and Gentiles, we are responsible for knowing and showing how the entire Bible is involved in it. It should not be just “[John 3:16](#) or I'll take you to my rabbi.”

So, what is the *Besorah* that I talk about? Well, it is everything about Yeshua, starting with what led up to his coming and why he must return. It is all of the covenants. It is Abraham, Isaac Jacob, Moses, the Temple, and the Law. It is all of the Feasts and their meaning in God's plan for the world. Indeed, we do need training in explaining the *Besorah*, but presented in a Jewish way—not with fear of Hellfire and damnation, but in a way that enhances our relationship with our heavenly Father. In a way that does not overly emphasize life after death (although that is an important part of it), but rather that focuses on our relationship with God and our lives with each other here and now.

So, to start us off, I want us to do two things. In the next few months, I want our *chavurah* leaders to set aside some time to teach on how to present the *Besorah* to Jewish people. Second, I want each *chavurah* to devote at least one session to giving its members some experience in presenting the *Besorah*.

—CJB

## **A Biblical Argument Against Human Evolution**

*Delivered December 14, 2013*

Genesis 1:1: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*

We all know about the debate between Evolutionists and Creationists, and we have all heard at least some of the arguments on both sides. Some of us have heard of the so-called “Scopes Monkey Trial” that pitted Clarence Darrow against William Jennings Bryan as they argued the pros and cons of a Tennessee law that made it illegal to teach human evolution in publicly funded schools. Was man created by God the way the Book of Genesis explains it, or did man evolve from more primitive forms of life through a process of natural selection? Those were the key questions—questions that are still debated today.

Some folks would merge the two precepts, suggesting that God might have created man through an evolutionary process. Others contend that evolution is entirely inconsistent with the Bible’s account of creation and is an attack on both the Bible and the existence of God. Some consider evolution a mere theory, while others teach it as scientific fact. The result thus far has been that evolution is taught as a fact in most American public schools, and creationism is rarely taught at all.

My personal reason for believing in creation is, first and foremost, that God made himself known to me in a supernatural visitation. That makes my faith in the biblical account unshakeable, but I am concerned for those who have not had such an experience and I therefore want to be able to show the truth of creation and the error of evolution in a way that does not require having had a personal encounter such as mine. I believe that God wants it also, and has shown me logic for why evolution, as an explanation for human existence, is patently false.

In 1859, a naturalist named Charles Darwin published a book with the title “On the Origin of Species.” In it, Darwin theorized that living species evolved from one to the other through a process that he called “natural selection,” and that some refer to as “survival of the fittest.” What Darwin meant by “natural selection” was that some life forms spontaneously developed favorable characteristics for survival, and these reproduced more prolifically and eventually outpaced and replaced similar life forms that had less favorable characteristics. In his book, Darwin wrote:

“I can see no difficulty in a race of bears being rendered, by natural selection, more aquatic in their structure and habits, with larger and larger mouths, till a creature was produced as monstrous as a whale...”

That was a pretty far-fetched statement and it earned Darwin much ridicule. However, others picked up on the idea and promoted it more successfully.

Certain scientific discoveries seemed to lend credibility to Darwin’s theory of natural selection. One of these was the uncovering of the remains of extinct vertebrate animals that, by carbon dating, appeared to be millions of years older than the commonly understood age of the world derived from the Bible. Also, when these animals had their fossilized skeletons reconstructed and placed in order of oldest to the most recent through carbon dating, one could imagine and theorize that their

differences were the result of one animal having changed into the other. Another discovery that seemed to lend credibility to evolution through natural selection was finding that some bacteria were able to mutate and develop resistance to antibiotics that were lethal to those bacteria that had not mutated. New strains of bacteria had developed from old ones.

To bring our evolution discussion up to date and into the realm of speculative physics, cosmologists today theorize that our universe came into existence approximately thirteen billion years ago through a massive explosion that they call the “big bang.” How this came to be or where the original energy came from to cause the “big bang” they cannot say. Anyway, the result of the big bang is said to have been mostly hydrogen and a small number of other elements and compounds that were synthesized by the enormous heat and pressure. From that, they say, came the stars and the planets. And how did life begin and become beings such as we? That is where evolutionists, in their attempt to deny the existence of God, try to explain things through Darwinian natural selection. Here is how they say it works.

Sometime after the big bang and after the earth was formed, floating around on it was what evolutionists call a “primordial soup” (aka “primordial ooze”). By chance, certain molecules collided and combined with other molecules, and ultimately, the right combinations found each other and formed structures that could reproduce. Through random errors in their reproduction (mutations), certain offspring of those early “life” forms (not yet even single cells) found themselves competing for space and nutrients in their shared environment. Those that were more adaptable took from those that were less adaptable, and the more adaptable survived and reproduced while the less adaptable did not. And so, began a process of natural selection that, mutation by mutation, over millions of years, resulted in the first one-celled animals, then the invertebrates, then the vertebrates, and eventually us. So, ultimately, and according to the evolutionists, we did not even evolve from monkeys—we evolved from soup, and it was all by chance. Now I ask those who think that believing in God is irrational: This is rational?

My message today is not meant to be a scientific exposition, but rather a biblical one to show that humans did not evolve through natural selection but were created by God. When you want to show that something is true when there are only two possibilities, one way to go about it is to select the one you believe is not true, treat it as though it were true, and follow it to its logical conclusion. If the conclusion you reach contradicts something you know for a fact to be true, then you must conclude that what you selected for the test was, as you suspected, not true, and the alternative that was not selected must therefore have been true.

Now in this discussion on evolution, we are considering only two possibilities: (1) Man was created by God as taught in the Book of Genesis; and (2) Man evolved from simpler animals and earlier forms of life through the process of Darwinian natural selection. Since I believe that the first of these is true, i.e. that God created man, I will develop a logical narrative around the second one that is consistent with what evolutionists teach, and we will see where it leads. Here is my evolutionist narrative; remember, it is not real; it is just a test narrative:

*Man evolved through a process of natural selection, whereby earlier more adaptive forms of life survived because they could dominate over others that were less hearty and less adaptable*

*in their environments. As the earlier forms of life evolved into simple animals, competition for survival became more direct and more combative, with the stronger, faster, more instinctive, and generally more capable animals prevailing over those that were less so. The process of “natural selection” preferred those animals that could take food away from others, take mates away from others, win fights with others, run away from others, or eat others without being eaten themselves. Those that survived as the fittest, won over the other animals because, through “natural selection,” they had been bred superior in their adaptability. And always, the choice for an animal was: “It is either him or me. If I don’t do it to him first, he is going to do it me.”*

*Over millions of years, man’s intelligence developed (still through the mechanism of mutation and natural selection) to where man gained the capacity to reason abstractly and collectively. Men began to think about why they and their neighbors were conducting themselves in certain ways, and they came to conclusions about which of the ways were most beneficial to their individual and group survival and which of the ways were not. They developed principles about their behaviors, and eventually organized the principles into laws that they thought would enhance their survival both as individuals and as a species. One community that referred to itself by the name “Israel,” taught that there was an invisible God who had created them, had given them laws to help them survive attacks from within, and helped them prevail over assaults from neighboring enemies. This body of law consisted of individual statutes, the most prominent of which are what has become known as the Ten Commandments:*

- 1. I am your lord and god who made you to do as I command.*
- 2. You shall have no other gods but me.*
- 3. You shall construct images of me in all your dwellings to remind you that I am ever-present and am watching all that you do.*
- 4. You shall fear me as a god who can kill you because I am stronger than you and, likewise, you shall seek to be stronger than your neighbors and enemies so that you can kill them as well.*
- 5. Love is a manifestation of weakness and is counter-productive to your survival; you must abstain from it.*
- 6. There shall be no day on which you rest, for you must be ever vigilant against those who would take away what you have and cause you harm.*
- 7. You shall be obedient to your father and mother during the years in which they feed and protect you, but you shall become independent of them and self-sufficient as soon as you possibly can.*
- 8. You shall not hesitate to kill if it will ensure your survival.*
- 9. If your neighbor falls ill, you shall take his goods for yourself, so that the healthier of you can survive.*

*10. Marriage and children enhance family survivability through the sharing of work, and for mutual protection. Copulating with as many of the opposite sex as are willing is encouraged in order to produce children of such a number as to ensure your species' survival.*

Do you recognize these ten “commandments?” No, I don’t expect that you do, because they are contrary to and contradict the real Ten Commandments. But these are the kinds of laws that man would have invented, had man evolved through natural selection, because natural selection puts survival above all other values. The real Ten Commandments and other laws and examples in the Bible with which we are familiar are quite the opposite of those that were derived through our exercise of logic. The Bible’s laws and examples do not emphasize self-protection, but rather loving others, preferring others, even sacrificing ourselves for others, and relying upon God for our protection. If God did not create us and we evolved because of how strong we were, how fit we were, and how competent we were to protect ourselves, we (when I say “we” I mean mankind) would never have invented and promoted laws, values, and principles of living such as we find in the Bible because they go against the attributes and values that we employed to survive. The Bible’s very existence is proof that there is a God and that He created all.

Here are some examples in the Bible that run counter to self-preservation:

### **Empathy for One’s Father**

In Genesis 44:30-34, we find Judah pleading with Joseph:

*“Therefore, I beg you, let your servant stay as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go up with his brothers. For how can I go up to my father if the boy isn’t with me? I couldn’t bear to see my father so overwhelmed by anguish.”*

### **Not Bearing a Grudge and Loving One’s Neighbor**

Leviticus 19:18: *“Don’t take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI.”*

### **Being Willing to Die for One’s People**

Esther 4:15-16: *“Ester had them return this answer to Mordechai: “Go, assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan, and have them fast for me, neither eating nor drinking for three days, night and day; also I and the girls attending me will fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.”*

### **Loving One’s Enemy**

Matthew 5:43-44: *“You have heard that our fathers were told, ‘Love your neighbor—and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!”*

These do not sound very survival-friendly, do they? Here’s more:

### **Not Worrying about One's Life and Provisions**

Matthew 6:25: *“Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life—what you will eat or drink; or about your body—what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?”*

### **Not Seeking to Preserve One's Life**

Matthew 10:39: *“Whoever finds his own life will lose it, but the person who loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

Here's a good one:

### **Sacrificing One's Life for Another**

John 15:13: *“No one has greater love than a person who lays down his life for his friends.”*

Here's another good one:

### **Helping Others with Their Burdens**

Galatians 6:2: *“Bear one another's burdens—in this way you will be fulfilling the Torah's true meaning, which the Messiah upholds.”*

And here is perhaps the very best one because it is the antithesis of pursuing one's own survival:

### **Not Acting in Rivalry, and Seeking to Protect the Other Person's Interests**

Philippians 2:3-4: *“Do nothing out of rivalry or vanity; but, in humility, regard each other as better than yourselves—look out for each other's interests and not just for your own.”*

Whatever your theological leanings and whatever your level of faith, you must concede that the moral laws in the Bible historically exist and that mankind has largely accepted them as virtues. Humans who developed through natural selection, without God, could not—would not—have come up with the biblical precepts of conduct that are so selfless and make one so vulnerable to one's fellow man.

The evolution narrative that I read to you earlier has to be wrong therefore, and man did not evolved from simpler forms of life through natural selection. But even without going through this entire exercise, the truth of creation should strike us as intuitive. Besides Scripture saying so in Romans 1:20, if the two primary assumptions of evolution were true, i.e. (1) that there is no God who created, and (2) that man evolved via natural selection, then human beings who came by way of that process could never have invented and could never have supported principles such as we find in the Bible—love, sacrifice, putting others first—all of these speak against survival of the fittest.

One last thought: Although man was created by God, his survival ironically did depend upon strength. But it was not man's strength; it was God's strength, for as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10:

*“But he [God] told me, “My grace is enough for you, for my power is brought to perfection in weakness. Therefore, I am very happy to boast about my weaknesses, in order that the Messiah's power will rest upon me. Yes, I am well pleased with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties endured on behalf of the Messiah; for it is when I am weak that I am strong.”*

So, in the end, we do survive by “survival of the fittest,” but the fittest are those who depend on the strength of the Lord. Let us therefore pray that we may have the kind of weaknesses that Paul had so that we, like Paul, can be very strong, and very fit.

—CJB

## The Biblical Marriage Covenant

*Delivered December 1, 2012*

Today, I want to talk to you about the biblical marriage covenant. “Why ‘biblical’ marriage,” you may ask? Isn’t all marriage biblical?” Well, it used to be that way, but it seems not anymore, as an increasing number of states legislate “marriage” to mean things that God never intended. But that is not why I chose to speak about marriage today. The reason I did is that counseling couples toward marriage, and ministering to families after marriage (including to children), are among the most important things that happen in any Messianic Jewish congregation, and they are high on the priority list of what I do as a pastoral leader. The covenant of marriage is a large topic to try and do justice to in 20 or so minutes, so fasten your seat belts, and here we go!

*Genesis 2:18-24: “ADONAI, God, said, “It isn’t good that the person should be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him.” So from the ground ADONAI, God, formed every wild animal and every bird that flies in the air; and he brought them to the person to see what he would call them. Whatever the person would call each living creature, that was to be its name. So the person gave names to all the livestock, to the birds in the air and to every wild animal. But for Adam there was not found a companion suitable for helping him. Then God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the person; and while he was sleeping, he took one of his ribs and closed up the place from which he took it with flesh. The rib which ADONAI, God, had taken from the person, he made a woman-person; and he brought her to the man-person. The man-person said, “At last! This is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She is to be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” This is why a man is to leave his father and mother and stick with his wife, and they are to be one flesh.”*

Some translations say “man” instead of “person,” and “cleave” instead of “stick,” but no matter. The resulting “one flesh” makes the leaving and cleaving “covenantal” and, because it is introduced so early in Genesis, I consider it a “creation” covenant as distinguished from other covenants that were made later. We call this creation covenant “marriage” and, although Maimonides does not specifically refer to Genesis 2, he includes the *mitzvah* of a marriage ceremony in his compilation of six-hundred thirteen commandments:<sup>12</sup>

*“By this injunction we are commanded to take a woman to wife [only] by a binding ceremony: either by giving her something [of value], or by handing her a writ of marriage, or by intercourse [accompanied by a declaration of marriage]. This is the commandment regarding the marriage ceremony.”*

Although Genesis 2:24 speaks of a “man” leaving his parents to join with his wife, the covenant of becoming “one flesh” cannot be fulfilled unless the wife similarly leaves her parents. The “leaving” of parents in the Genesis Scripture is not a reference to where newlyweds decide to live. The Scripture is speaking of their need to leave the controlling influence of their respective parents—

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<sup>12</sup> Charles B. Chavel, *The Commandments: Sefer Ha-Mitzvoth of Maimonides* in two volumes, vol. 1, p.229, “The Law of Marriage,” (London: The Soncino Press, 1967).



control that their parents rightly had over them when they were young and single but which is improper and interfering if it continues when the child (man or woman) grows up and marries.

I believe the reason Genesis 2:24 reads the way it does, is that a man's responsibility to leave his parents is different from a woman's. It is the man's responsibility to take the initiative in leaving, but it is the woman's parents' responsibility to release her to her intended husband. The implication of her parents not doing so is of course obvious, and problems result after marriage if either or both of the marrieds allow their earlier ties to their parents to continue in an improper way.

Proverbs 22:6 says:

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

And Ephesians 6:1 says:

*“Children, what you should do in union with the Lord is obey your parents, for this is right.”*

But there is another Scripture, 1 Corinthians 13:11 that says:

*“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, argued like a child; now that I have become a man, I have finished with childish ways.”*

There is a time in God's scheme of things when children and their parents must change the way they relate to each other so that this Scripture can be fulfilled. Upon marrying, children must be willing to step away from their parents, and parents must be willing to let them go by releasing them to their mates and to God. Although there are other times and reasons to release children as well (e.g. when children grow up and move out on their own), the primary time for parental release and for children leaving the nest is when they marry.

The concept of becoming “one flesh” is not only covenantal, it is also mystical and is not easy to comprehend. Mark 10:6-8 attempts to explain it by stating:

*“However, at the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man should leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two are to become one flesh. Thus they are no longer two, but one.”*

Also, Ephesians 5:31-33 relates the phenomenon to Messiah and the Body of Believers by stating:

*“Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and remain with his wife, and the two will become one.” There is profound truth hidden here, which I say concerns the Messiah and the Messianic Community. However, the text also applies to each of you individually:”*

This “oneness” of flesh possibly reminds us of the plural unity that we see in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There are many other passages in the Bible about marriage—too many to cite, but here are two that have to do with sex in marriage that are worth remembering:

1 Corinthians 7:1-2: *“Now to deal with the questions you wrote about: “Is it good for a man to keep away from women?” Well, because of the danger of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband.”*

Hebrews 13:4a: *“Marriage is honorable in every respect; and, in particular, sex within marriage is pure.”*

Now as for marrying or not marrying, some interpret Genesis 2:24, as being God’s commandment that everyone should marry. I do not see it that way, especially in light of Paul’s remark in 1 Corinthians 7:8:

*“Now to the single people and the widows I say that it is fine if they remain unmarried like me...”*

And in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 Paul says:

*“What I want is for you to be free of concern. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord’s affairs, with how to please the Lord; but the married man concerns himself with the world’s affairs, with how to please his wife; and he finds himself split. Likewise the woman who is no longer married or the girl who has never been married concerns herself with the Lord’s affairs, with how to be holy both physically and spiritually; but the married woman concerns herself with the world’s affairs, with how to please her husband. I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to put restrictions on you—I am simply concerned that you live in a proper manner and serve the Lord with undivided devotion.”*

Scripture mentions several other reasons that some do not marry, which I will mention only for the sake of trying to be complete; they are in Matthew 19:12 which states:

*“For there are different reasons why men do not marry—some because they were born without the desire, some because they have been castrated, and some because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever can grasp this, let him do so.”*

I believe that Scripture teaches that the norm of creation is to marry and procreate, but Scripture also allows for not doing so and teaches that, in some cases, singleness is God’s higher will for an individual. Still, marriage is portrayed in Scripture as a *simcha* (a happy event)—well, perhaps not in *Hosea’s* case but, since it is a *simcha* for most of us, let us sample just a few of the most prominent weddings in the Bible:

Genesis 24:67: *“Then Yitz’chak brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent and took Rivkah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. Thus was Yitz’chak comforted for the loss of his mother.”*

1 Samuel 25:40-42: *“When David’s servants reached Avigayil in Karmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to bring you to him to be his wife.” She got up, bowed with her face to*

*the ground, and said, “Your servant is here to serve you, to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” Avigayil then hurried, set out and rode off on a donkey, with five of her female servants following her; she went after David’s messengers; and she became his wife.”*

*Ruth 4:10-13: “Also I am acquiring as my wife Rut the woman from Mo’av, the wife of Machlon, in order to raise up in the name of the deceased an heir for his property; so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his kinsmen and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses today.” All the people at the gate and the leaders said, “We are witnesses. May ADONAI make the woman who has come into your house like Rachel and like Le’ah, who between them built up the house of Isra’el. Do worthy deeds in Efrat; become renowned in Beit-Lechem. May your house, because of the seed ADONAI will give you from this young woman, become like the house of Peretz, whom Tamar bore to Y’udah.” So Bo’az took Rut, and she became his wife. He had sexual relations with her, ADONAI enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.”*

In deciding to give this message on marriage, I had not intended to speak about divorce. However, as I began to write, I realized that what Scripture has to say about divorce is part of what it has to say about marriage—it is the flip-side of the covenant (if you will)—and cannot be avoided if one is to understand the entire biblical picture. I am currently collaborating with our *Shaliach* Dan Juster on writing a *mitzvah* on divorce for our book “The Law of Messiah” and, believe me, it is not an easy subject. I will endeavor to address it here only briefly—just enough to acquaint you with some of the Scriptures that speak about it, and to give you some understanding of the principles that are involved.

One of the difficulties in understanding the subject of divorce is that there is a New Covenant Scripture in which Yeshua appears to contradict Moses. In Matthew 19:7 Yeshua was asked:

*“Then why did Moshe give the commandment that a man should hand his wife a get and divorce her?”*

To which He answered in verse 8:

*“Moshe allowed you to divorce your wives because your hearts are so hardened. But this is not how it was at the beginning.”*

On first appearance, what Yeshua says in verse 8 is a very strange. Is he saying that Moses encouraged the Israelites to do that which God prohibited? The answer is, of course, “No!” God did (and does) not want divorce and, in fact, we read in Malachi 2:15b-16a:

*“Therefore, take heed to your spirit, and don’t break faith with the wife of your youth. “For I hate divorce,” says ADONAI the God of Isra’el,…”*

Nevertheless, God never gave a commandment to the Israelites prohibiting divorce, and so that which Yeshua was referring when he said: “*this is not how it was at the beginning.*” was the narrative in Genesis 2:24 that says:

*“This is why a man is to leave his father and mother and stick with his wife, and they are to be one flesh.”*

In other words, Yeshua was referring to how God established marriage “*b’reishit*” (in the beginning), and not to some later commandment that Moses allegedly violated.

The various discussions and debates concerning divorce generally center around questions like: Who can initiate a divorce? For what reasons? And what are the implications for remarriage? These are the issues with which Dan Juster and I are wrestling, and I am afraid you will have to wait for us to write our *mitzvah* to know where we stand on these things. Meanwhile, I think I can safely say this: God does not explicitly authorize anyone to break the covenant of marriage through divorce.

But what of Yeshua’s words in Matthew 5:32 where He says:

*“...But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of fornication, makes her an adulteress...”*

Or Yeshua’s similar words in Matthew 19:9?

*“...whoever divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery!”*

Isn’t Yeshua authorizing the ending of marriages in which the husband or wife has committed adultery? The answer is: No! He is not giving permission for anyone to break their marriage covenant. Yes, He is authorizing divorce for the innocent party in such a situation, but only because the guilty party has already ended the marriage by breaking the marriage covenant. Under these circumstances, divorce does not break the covenant—it merely confirms legally that the covenant has been broken, and it releases the innocent party to remarry if he or she so desires. Understand, though, that the innocent party is not obligated to seek a divorce. He or she has the option to forgive the breach of covenant and seek restoration of the marriage. The option is with the innocent party.

But there is the remaining question of why Deuteronomy 24:1-3 seems to support terminating marriages for seemingly trivial reasons; it reads:

*“Suppose a man marries a woman and consummates the marriage but later finds her displeasing, because he has found her offensive in some respect. He writes her a divorce document, gives it to her and sends her away from his house. She leaves his house, goes and becomes another man’s wife; but the second husband dislikes her and writes her a get, gives it to her and sends her away from his house...”*

...and so on! The Pharisees were not confused by this when they asked Yeshua about it; they were baiting him! They understood (and we should also) that this passage of Scripture is not an authorization to divorce—it is a hypothetical meant to teach a point that is made in the verses that follow, that a husband cannot, after releasing his wife to another, later reclaim her.

Well, divorce is a heavy subject and I would like to end this talk on a happy note because marriage is meant to be happy. So how shall I end it? I will tell you about my marriage to Marie, of almost thirty-nine years, that is truly happy. I wrote a poem to her, fifteen years ago, that I will share with you today; its title is, appropriately, “Marie,” and it goes like this:

Marie, Marie, wife to me,  
Without whose life I’d nowhere be.  
Life...  
Wife...  
Selflessly...  
Gift from God enduringly.

Marie, Marie, wife to me,  
Devoted helpmate lovingly.  
Love...  
Dove...  
Faithfully...  
I thank God for you endlessly.

—NKJ

## Covenants, Commandments and Torah

*Delivered December 29, 2018*

A covenant is a promissory act that defines how one party will relate to another. There are two kinds of covenants—“bilateral” and “unilateral.” A bilateral covenant exists where each party promises something to the other, and the promises are made one for the other. Implicit in a bilateral covenant is that each party agrees to something in order to obtain the promise of the other. A unilateral covenant, on the other hand, is a binding promise made by one party to another where the second party has made no promise to the other in return. The promise in a unilateral covenant is binding by virtue of the honor and integrity of the party who makes the promise.

The Bible records many covenants made between men and between God and men, but I will limit myself to discussing only three of them. The first of these is the Adamic Covenant, called this because it was made between God and Adam. Genesis 2:8-9 followed by Genesis 2:15-17 defines the Adamic Covenant as follows:

*“ADONAI, God, planted a garden toward the east, in ‘Eden, and there he put the person whom he had formed. Out of the ground ADONAI, God, caused to grow every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

*“ADONAI, God, took the person and put him in the garden of ‘Eden to cultivate and care for it. ADONAI, God, gave the person this order: ‘You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die.’”*

In my opinion, the Covenant was unilateral because there was no corresponding expression required from Adam in order for it to come into existence. On the other hand, one can argue that the Covenant was bilateral in that God’s offer to Adam of all the edible fruit in the garden was conditioned on Adam obeying God’s Commandment<sup>13</sup> to not eat from or touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Although the Bible does not record any corresponding words of agreement on Adam’s part, his initial response of not objecting and not eating the prohibited fruit implied his agreement.

We know what happened after that. Genesis 3:1-6 records that Adam was tempted and violated God’s law by eating of the forbidden tree, thereby breaking the Covenant. When a covenant is broken by one of the parties the covenant ceases to exist, and the innocent party has the option of being released from his promise or promises that he made in reliance thereof.<sup>12</sup> God withdrew his promise to feed Adam, put him outside of the garden, and said to him in Genesis 3:17-19:

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<sup>13</sup> A *commandment* is the same as, or analogous to, a statute.

<sup>14</sup> This is the law pertaining to modern covenants. There is no reason to believe that it was any different in regard to ancient covenants, since each time man broke his covenant with God, God withdrew or adjusted his corresponding promise(s).

*“Because you listened to what your wife said and ate from the tree about which I gave you the order; ‘You are not to eat from it,’ the ground is cursed on your account; you will work hard to eat from it as long as you live. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat field plants. You will eat bread by the sweat of your forehead till you return to the ground—for you were taken out of it: you are dust, and you will return to dust.”*”

And so, as promised by God’s law that accompanied the Covenant, Adam and his progeny (all of mankind present and future) died—not physically, but spiritually—in that men lost the eternal life with God that God meant for them to have. However, in his great compassion, God committed himself to a replacement covenant—a way for mankind to redeem itself. This brings us to the next great covenant we will discuss—the “Abrahamic Covenant.”<sup>15</sup>

It was many years later, and we read in [Genesis 15:17-21](#) how God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised to give him and his descendants land—land that we now call Israel. On the one hand, it was unilateral because Abraham was not asked to agree:

*After the sun had set and there was thick darkness, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared, which passed between these animal parts. That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram: “I have given this land to your descendants—from the Vadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River—the territory of the Keni, the K’nizi, the Kadmoni, the Hitti, the P’rizi, the Refa’im, the Emori, the Kena’ani, the Girgashi and the Y’vusi.”*

God then tested Abraham, and subsequently broadened the Covenant to include Abraham’s descendants after him as parties. These descendants were later called “the children of Israel” and much later “the Jewish People.” God also made the Covenant everlasting, promised Abraham that He would be God to Abraham’s descendants, and promised Abraham that he would be the “father of many nations.” As He did in the Adamic Covenant, God issued a Commandment connected to the Covenant that required Abraham and the males of his household and descendants after him to be circumcised in the foreskins of their flesh; anyone who was not circumcised would be cut off from the Covenant and the covenant people. I previously said that the Covenant was unilateral, but it is arguable that this condition made the Covenant bilateral because Abraham could have refused circumcision. We read about this in [Genesis 17:4-14](#):

*“As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you. I will give you and your descendants after you the land in which you are now foreigners, all the land of Kena’an, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God.” God said to Avraham, “As for you, you are to keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to*

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<sup>15</sup> The Noahic Covenant is being skipped over.

*be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised, including slaves born within your household and those bought from a foreigner not descended from you. The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who will not let himself be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin—that person will be cut off from his people, because he has broken my covenant.”*

Notice that the Abrahamic Covenant was a step in the direction of redeeming mankind from the death that resulted from Adam’s disobedience. Why God chose to proceed in this way (i.e. redeem mankind through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Jewish people) I do not know, but many years later we come to another great covenant given through Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai that we call the Sinaitic or Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was bilateral in that God declared it with the expectation that the Israelites would accept and they did. We read in [Exodus 19:2-8](#):

*After setting out from Refidim and arriving at the Sinai Desert, they set up camp in the desert; there in front of the mountain, Isra’el set up camp. Moshe went up to God, and ADONAI called to him from the mountain: “Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya’akov, to tell the people of Isra’el: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.” Moshe came, summoned the leaders of the people and presented them with all these words which ADONAI had ordered him to say. All the people answered as one, “Everything ADONAI has said, we will do.” Moshe reported the words of the people to ADONAI.*

As part of the Mosaic Covenant, God gave the Israelites commandments that are collectively known as the “Mosaic Law.” The Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants existed simultaneously for a time but eventually the Mosaic Covenant was breached by the Israelites by their disobeying the commandments connected to it. We read in [Jeremiah 31:30\(31\)-31:33:34](#):

*“Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI. “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.”*

Also, we read in [Hosea 6:7](#):

*“But they, just like men, have broken the covenant, they have been faithless in dealing with me.”*



Jeremiah prophesied that because the Mosaic Covenant had been violated by the Israelites, God would one day provide a New Covenant that would be different. And Hebrews 8:6 says:

*“But now the work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as Torah on the basis of better promises.”*

When Israel breached the Mosaic Covenant God could have ended it abruptly, but He did not. Instead, God decided to phase the Mosaic Covenant out but maintain it until such time as the New Covenant would come into existence and fully take its place. We read of how the Mosaic Covenant was on its way to vanishing in Hebrews 8:13:

*“By using the term, “new,” he has made the first [Mosaic] covenant “old...” and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.”*

Well, the promised New Covenant did come, ushered in with the incarnation, sacrifice and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, and with the Holy Spirit who now indwells all who are willing to receive him. That is what the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:32b-33a meant by:

*“I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest...”*

Is the Mosaic Covenant now completely gone or is it still in the process of vanishing? When the Hebrews epistle was written, the Temple was still standing, and the animal sacrifices were still being performed by the Levitical Priests. Neither of those conditions exist today which (at the very least) supports the likelihood that the Mosaic Covenant is no longer fully operative. Whether the Mosaic Covenant is in a diminished state or is already fully gone, it is clear that the covenants that are most strong and most effective today are the New Covenant and the Abraham Covenant (running alongside it) that is eternal. We can disagree as to whether or not the Mosaic Covenant has now fully ended or is still in the process of vanishing, but it is clear that much of what was commanded as part of the Mosaic Covenant cannot be complied with today because much of it relies on the Temple sacrifices and a God-led government of Israel—neither of which currently exist.

Because of Hebrews 8:13 and the subsequent destruction of the Temple, I contend (although some do not agree) that the Mosaic Covenant has already come to an end. The Mosaic *Torah* (as distinguished from the Covenant) has not, however, because *Torah* is God’s fundamental teaching—God’s law (his will for man’s morality, wisdom, and conduct) that transcends all covenants. As a matter of fact, according to Matthew 5:18, none of God’s *Torah* will come to an end until “heaven and earth pass away:”

*“Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah—not until everything that must happen has happened.”*

So, if the Mosaic *Torah* has not passed away, where did it go? It is my opinion that it transcended the Mosaic Covenant, passed into the New Covenant, and became New Covenant *Torah*. How am

I willing to make such a declaration? Partially because of Scriptures such as Proverbs 1:8-9 and Proverbs 3:1-4:

Proverbs 1:8-9: *“My son, heed the discipline of your father, and do not abandon the teaching [Torah] of your mother; they will be a garland to grace your head, a medal of honor for your neck.”*

Proverbs 3:1-4: *“My son, don’t forget my teaching [Torah], keep my commands in your heart; for they will add to you many days, years of life and peace. Do not let grace and truth leave you—bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and esteem in the sight of God and of people.”*

Notice that the underlying Hebrew word translated “teaching” in these two Scriptures is “*Torah*.”

Also, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states:

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.”*

What this tells me is that when there are Mosaic Commandments that no longer can (or no longer should) be complied with literally due to changes in covenant, because Mosaic Commandments are Scripture, we are assured that there are components derived from them that are continuously valuable—that transcend the Mosaic Covenant, pass into the New Covenant, and become New Covenant Law. Those components are *Torah*—God’s foundational teaching.

Consider this example. If during the Mosaic Covenant an Israelite committed adultery, his offense was that he violated the commandment of Exodus 20:13b(14):

*“Do not commit adultery.”*

In that case, Leviticus 20:10 would apply:

*“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife, that is, with the wife of a fellow countryman, both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”*

If, on the other hand, a Jew (or non-Jew) in the western world were to commit adultery in today’s New Covenant era, his offense would not be that he violated Exodus 20:13b(14); this is clear due to the fact that the capital punishment required by Leviticus 20:10 cannot not be applied (we in the Western World no longer execute people for committing adultery). His offense would be that he violated New Covenant *Torah*, and the Holy Spirit would see to his punishment.

It is not always easy to know what the underlying *Torah* of a Commandment is so, when I am unsure, I consult the Holy Spirit through prayer. An example of one I wrestled with is Numbers 15:38-40:

*“Speak to the people of Isra’el, instructing them to make, through all their generations, tzitziyot on the corners of their garments, and to put with the tzitzit on each corner a blue thread. It is to be a tzitzit for you to look at and thereby remember all of ADONAI’s mitzvot and obey them, so*

*that you won't go around wherever your own heart and eyes lead you to prostitute yourselves; but it will help you remember and obey all my mitzvot and be holy for your God."*

I was practicing law at the time and was wearing *tzitziyot* (fringes) that showed from under my jacket and looked (I thought) unkempt when I appeared in court. I asked the Lord to allow me an alternative to wearing fringes that would accomplish the same thing; perhaps a Star of David on a chain around my neck. "No," said the Lord.<sup>16</sup> "That may be acceptable for some, but I want you to stand out as a Jew who believes in Yeshua." I have worn fringes ever since.

Because God's instructions and will for man are expressed and often even clarified in the New Covenant Scriptures, I consider all *Torah* today to be "New Covenant *Torah*" even if its origin is Mosaic. As for the application of *Torah* to Gentiles, according to Numbers 15:14-16, there is one *Torah* for all who live together in a Jewish community:

*"If a foreigner stays with you—or whoever may be with you, through all your generations—and he wants to bring an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for ADONAI, he is to do the same as you. For this community there will be the same law for you as for the foreigner living with you; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations; the foreigner is to be treated the same way before ADONAI as yourselves. The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you."*

That of course applies to Gentiles in a Messianic Jewish congregational community as well but, lest one think that I am espousing what has become known as "one law theology," I am not, so permit me to explain the difference. "One law theology" proclaims that there is only one *Torah*; that much is true. However, it also proclaims that all facets of the one *Torah* are applied the same to the Jew and the Gentile. That is the part that is not true. God's *Torah* is (and always has been) a single body of law that has multiple components, each of which must be applied correctly according to the circumstance and the identity of the person(s) subject to it. So, for example, certain parts of God's New Covenant *Torah* apply to men, certain parts to women, and most parts to both. Similarly, certain parts of God's New Covenant *Torah* apply to Jews, certain parts to Gentiles, and most parts to both. So, for example, while Jews are required to circumcise the males among them throughout their generations, it is only optional for Gentiles, and should not be done thinking that it is a commandment of God for a Gentile or that it will change a Gentile into a Jew. Another example is keeping the Sabbath. According to Exodus 31:13-14, Jews are required to keep God's Sabbaths, and a Jew may expect punishment if he does not. It is not the same for Gentiles, however. According to Isaiah 56:4-7, Gentiles are encouraged (not required) to keep God's Sabbaths, are rewarded if they do, but are not punished if they do not.

Regrettably, my speaking time is up, and I have so much more that I want to say. This is a difficult subject, so please do not hesitate to come to me afterwards with any questions you may have.

—CJB

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<sup>16</sup> I heard God's inaudible still small voice.

## The Deity and Worship of Yeshua

*Delivered April 24, 2010*

I spent most of last week at the Borough Park Symposium in New York, where Scholars in our movement and from around the world gathered to discuss the deity of Yeshua and its relevance to Messianic Judaism. The title of the Symposium was “The Deity of Messiah and the Mystery of God.” Papers were presented on related subjects, responsive papers were given, and then time was allotted for all of those in attendance to ask questions of the presenters and to make comments.

Some of those who attended the symposium with whom we are acquainted were Russ Resnik, David Rudolph, Mark Kinzer, Mitch Glaser, Jason Sobel, Barry Rubin, Elliot Klayman, Jeff Feinberg, Mike Brown, Paul Liberman, Joel Liberman, David Sedaca, Joseph Shulam, Marty Goetz, Jan Moskowitz, Joshua Brumbach, Howard Silverman, and Matt Rosenberg. There was also representation from Israel and England.

The main paper topics and presenters were these:

1. *The significance of the Deity of Yeshua*—Mark Kinzer and Mitch Glaser
2. *Jewish History and the Deity of Yeshua*—Klayman
3. *The Canon of Scripture and the Deity of Yeshua*—Darrel Bock
4. *Jewish Tradition and the Deity of Yeshua*—Joseph Shulam
5. *Communicating the Deity of Yeshua to the Jewish People*—Daniel Nessim and Richard Harvey
6. *Communicating the Deity of Yeshua to the Post-Modern Jewish Community*—Jhan Moskowitz and Akiva Cohen
7. *The Future of the Messianic Jewish Movement and the Deity of Yeshua*—Joel Liberman, Howard Silverman, Matt Rosenberg, and Greg Zhelezny

Each presenter was given fifteen minutes—somewhat less time than I have to speak to you this morning, and since I did not deliver a paper at the symposium, I would like to deliver one to you today.

Let us begin with a little dramatization from some hypothetical thespians:

**Allen:** Good morning *Tanta*, I thought I would drop these radishes by this morning. We grew them in our own garden.

**Tanta Ida:** Good morning yourself. You do not just happen to drop by unless you want to *verdrey mein kopf* with that Masonic stuff and that goy Jesus.

**Allen:** You know me pretty well *Tanta*, but I do want to give you these radishes.

**Tanta Ida:** You know Allen, this Masonic thing you’re into would not bother me so much if this goy Jesus did not claim to be God. I do not know why Jews need a *mashiach* anyway, but at least

the Lubavitchers picked Schneerson who was a man, and they do not fall on their knees in front of his picture and worship him the way you do this Jesus.

**Allen:** *Tanta* Ida, you know better than that! We do not get on our knees in front of a picture of Yeshua; in fact, we do not encourage making pictures of him at all. And it is “Messianic”—not “Masonic.”

**Tanta Ida:** Okay, Messianic. But you worship him, don’t you? You say He is God, don’t you?

**Allen:** Well, kind of, but...

In *Tanta* Ida’s mind, Allen has lost the argument and she has won because Allen has agreed that he believes a man is God and that he worships a man.

Unless a Jew has been touched by the Holy Spirit and educated in the Bible, he or she is not going to accept the idea that the man Yeshua is deity, and that we ought to worship him. We should not expect it and, a matter of fact, we shouldn’t explain it that way in the first place. The deity of Yeshua is a very hard and mysterious concept for Jewish people and others as well, so let us review what the Bible has to say about it:

Isaiah 9:5(6): *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Isaiah 44:24; John 1:3-4; Colossians 1:16 (combined): *“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; ...All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”*

John 1:1 and 1:14: (combined) *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

Exodus 3:13-14; John 8:58: (combined) *“Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.’ ...Yeshua said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’”*

John 14:9-11: *“Yeshua said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”? ‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that*

*I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.’”*

John 20:28-29: *“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Yeshua said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”*

Colossians 2:8-10: *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Messiah. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”*

Philippians 2:5-7: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”*

1 Timothy 3:16: *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”*

Titus 2:11-13: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Yeshua the Messiah...”*

Hebrews 1:8-9: *“But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions.’”*

I want you to notice something. It is true that in some of these Scriptures Yeshua is referred to as God and we are told that in him resides the fullness of the deity, but the totality of Scripture explains that he is not all of God. The problem with Allen’s response is that if one says that Yeshua is God without qualifying what is meant, the logical understanding is that Yeshua is all of God and, therefore, when Yeshua came to earth as a man, God was no longer in Heaven taking care of the rest of the world. We know that that is not the case, so we should probably avoid using the expression “Jesus is God.”

If a Jewish enquirer says to us “I understand you think that Jesus is God,” the best approach is to enlist his patience for a somewhat lengthy explanation, and first take him to Isaiah 9:5(6) which is in the *Tanakh*—his own Bible:

*“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Inform him that this is commonly understood to be a messianic passage, and point out that his Jewish Bible teaches that someone who is born on earth is called "Mighty God."

From there, proceed to John 1 and show that "the Word" (identified as God), somehow becomes flesh as the son of God and dwells among us while God the Father remained in Heaven. If he objects to using references from the New Testament, point out that you are not trying to convince him; you are merely showing him how you have come to your conclusion about the deity of Yeshua. Of course, it is a mystery how all this can be, but no more so than the mystery of Isaiah 9. The reality is that all of Judaism is supernatural and mysterious—not only New Covenant Judaism.

Now let us look at what the Bible says about worshipping Yeshua—another "stick-in-the-craw" concept for a Jew. We begin with what Yeshua himself taught about who is to be worshipped:

*Matthew 4:8-10: "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.' Then Yeshua said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"*

So Yeshua says that only God is to be worshipped, yet we read, in Matthew 28:9, how Yeshua willingly received worship of himself:

*"And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Yeshua met them, saying, 'Rejoice!' So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him."*

Also, in John 9:35-38, referring to the man whose blindness Yeshua healed, we read:

*"Yeshua heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Yeshua said to him, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.' Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!' And he worshiped Him."*

And we read in Hebrews 1:1-6:

*"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You?' And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son?' But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'"*

So clearly Yeshua received worship, yet it seems so un-Jewish to fall on our knees or our faces in worship of Yeshua who most Jews do not accept as being God. In the synagogue, there is only one

time of the year when we may see worshippers prostrate themselves, and that is on *Yom Kippur* and, even then, most do not.

So, worshipping Yeshua is the second big hurdle for a Jew—even a Jewish seeker who comes to believe that Yeshua is *Adonai*. Is there anything we can do to soften the message? Not much without denying Yeshua’s divinity.

The Greek word for “worship” is *proskuneo*, and the Hebrew word is *shachah*. The literal meaning of both words is to fall on one’s face in homage—bending the knee to a superior being—submitting oneself to another’s will. Although bowing, kneeling, raising hands, and other physical posturing are authorized in Scripture in connection with worship, they are assigned less importance within Judaism than obeying God. We read about the triad of worship, obedience and love in Exodus 20:5-6, where God says:

*“...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”*

Yeshua made the same connection between love and obedience in John 14:15 where we read:

*“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”*

And also in John 14: 23-24 we read:

*“Yeshua answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.”*

Now I said that worship has to do with obedience, and you notice that in the “John” Scriptures, Yeshua refers to love but does not mention worship. Well, he means worship because one does not submit his will to another in such complete obedience unless one is Lord over the other, and that kind of submission is what worship is. When we refer to Yeshua *Adonai*, that is what we mean.

There are other expressions of worship as well, such as our lifting our hands to *Adonai*, singing hymns to him, and so on. But in order to help our Jewish brethren understand the deity of Yeshua and the appropriateness of worshipping him, we must first comprehend the critical importance of his deity ourselves.

New Covenant spiritual life begins with the salvation event we call being “born again.” Scripture gives a number of different formulae for acquiring salvation, but the most central one is to receive Yeshua as Lord, which is tantamount to worshipping him. Here are two Scriptures in point:

Romans 10:8-9: *“But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart “ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the*



*Lord Yeshua and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

*Acts 16:29-31: “Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”*

When I first came to faith, I understood the need to make God the Lord of my life, and I believed that Yeshua was the Messiah—God’s “messenger son”—but I did not, at first, come to terms with the idea that Yeshua was “God incarnate.” To me, the word “Lord” meant someone to whose authority I had to submit, but that person did not have to be God. After all, we are all familiar with English lords, landlords, and so on. I was slow in coming to the conviction that in Yeshua “dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” and, when I finally conceded it, I still did not understand why it mattered so much. It is clear to me though, that I was already walking in God’s salvation because I was growing spiritually by leaps and bounds and experiencing the Holy Spirit in a powerful way.

I now understand that it is impossible to fully appreciate Yeshua’s atoning sacrifice without acknowledging his deity; here is why: When God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden, he told Adam that if he ate of it, he would surely die. So, when Adam ate from the tree, his sentence of death was pre-determined, and both he and mankind (who would come from his loins) had to die. In his mercy, God did not want to destroy his creation yet, at the same time he could not go back on his word. So, God devised a plan whereby mankind would indeed die, but each man would have a choice between two kinds of deaths. One kind was a death of total annihilation which would befall an individual if he rejected God’s Messiah (God himself). The other kind of death would be granted to an individual who repented and embraced God as his Lord (in the person of Messiah). Although he would have to die physically, he would not be annihilated but rather be resurrected to new and eternal life.

There is more. In man’s fallen state, no natural man was worthy to stand in repentance for mankind. So, God placed a very special man on the earth, begotten of Miryam (a natural woman), and begotten of the Holy Spirit (God himself); the man was named “Yeshua.” Yeshua was special because he was fully mortal (i.e. he could experience physical death) and, at the same time, he was also fully divine. This duality was vital to fulfilling God’s promised justice that all mankind from Adam had to die for its sin. At the same time, it showed God’s mercy by allowing each individual to choose between the two deaths—the death of finality, and the one from which he would be resurrected (Ezekiel 18:14ff says that a repentant son shall not die for the sin of his father). Because Yeshua was fully man, he could legitimately stand as a representative of mankind and repent for mankind’s sins in a way that no one else could. Because he was also the sinless son of God, he could qualify as an unblemished sacrifice that would be acceptable and sufficient to atone for the sin of Adam. In this profound way, Yeshua was both the sacrifice and the priest performing the sacrifice.

If I, a man, want the kind of death that leads to eternal life, I must make God my Lord and savior in Yeshua, and receive his sacrificial death as my own. Making Yeshua Lord is not just saying it. It requires dying to self and exchanging our mortal life for the life given by the Holy Spirit; in other words, it requires being “born again.” You would think the choice would be a “no brainer,” but

people who do not acknowledge Yeshua for who he is find little reason to choose his will over their own; to them, serving him seems like foolishness.

So, let us now summarize. Yeshua is indeed the Word, God himself who came to earth as a man. And while in Yeshua was the fullness of the deity, Yeshua was not all of God because God the Father remained in Heaven (we have not yet even discussed the Holy Spirit). For that reason, the expression “Jesus is God” should be avoided because it is misleading unless it is qualified, and it is very difficult for Jewish people to initially accept. At the same time, the deity of Yeshua should never be denied because it is the very reason his atoning sacrifice works for us. We should give worship to Yeshua, and the most important kind of worship is to love him and obey his commandments. If a person to whom we are ministering accepts Yeshua as Lord but not as God, rejoice and don’t panic. Don’t feel that you have to push him to the understanding before he is ready. I got there, you got there, and he will get there through being impacted by Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we should be willing and able to explain all of this to any Jewish person (or non-Jewish person) who will listen, especially the part about having a choice of two kinds of death—the one leading to destruction, and the other leading to eternal life.

—NKJ

## Elephants in the Room

### What Paul Really Meant by His Comments on the Law

*Delivered October 1, 2011*

Messianic Judaism is similar to other “Judaisms” in seeking to apply the laws of *Torah* that God gave to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. Since those early days, many changes have occurred that impact our ability to keep the Law as our ancestors did. They include (1) a change in the Covenant, (2) Yeshua’s birth, ministry on earth, death and resurrection, (3) universal accessibility to the Holy Spirit, (4) expansion of the Scriptures to include the New Testament, (5) lack of a functioning Levitical Priesthood, (6) absence of the Holy Temple and, most important of all, (7) salvation through faith in Yeshua. These are the New Covenant realities under which we now live. Consequently, the way we keep God’s Law today cannot be literal obedience to the Mosaic statutes; rather, it must be guided by the Holy Spirit for both wisdom and application.

But as we seek the Holy Spirit for how to keep the Law, we are hindered by ever-present “elephants in the room.” The “elephants” of which I speak are the well-known writings of the Apostle Paul which seem to say that obeying the Mosaic Law is no longer profitable and may even cause spiritual harm. I have always known it was not so, but because I have had to restudy and rethink Paul’s statements every time someone pointed them out to me, I decided to write this short commentary in order to explain what I believe Paul really meant in his writings.

What follows is what is no doubt an over-simplistic treatment of Paul in a field where every year many scholarly books are written that seek to explain his writings. In no way do I mean to suggest that this message is complete, as I have not sought to address all the arguments and counter arguments that can be made. I therefore ask you receive this as merely my opinion to consider and nothing more.

Each numbered caption that follows is a statement one often hears from opponents of observing Biblical Law. Then following each caption are Scriptures (translated in the New King James), authored by Paul that are often used to support erroneous views of the Law, and after that comes my commentary. *The New King James translation*<sup>17</sup> is used because it and the NIV are among the most popular, and the most egregious in misrepresenting Paul.

#### **1. We no longer have to obey the Law because we are now under grace.**

*Romans 6:14: “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*

This sounds like Paul is saying that God’s “grace” releases us to do anything we want and from having to obey any of God’s laws. Why would the Apostle Paul, a confessed keeper of the Law (*Acts 21:17-26*), say such a thing? Did Yeshua’s appearance on earth and subsequent sacrifice cause God to change into a permissive liberal? I knew that could not be the case, but still, what Paul said perplexed me, so I decided to pray and ask God about it.

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<sup>17</sup> “Messiah” replaces “Christ” and “Yeshua” replaces “Jesus.”

What I believe I heard prophetically in reply is this: Being “under grace” is not automatically permissive as some would like it to be. Grace does sometimes imply permissive allowance or forgiveness but being under God’s grace does not mean that He always grants it to us. Rather, it means that we are subject to the operation of God’s grace and that He (and only He) decides when to extend it and when to withhold it.

Theologians often define “grace” (*kharis*) as “God’s unmerited favor” (which is correct) but, in his writings, Paul uses it metaphorically to mean God himself, whose very person embodies grace. Romans 6:14 is therefore informing us that our accountability is no longer merely to the “statutes” of God’s written Word (his *Torah* or Law) but is now directly to God himself through the living Word, who is Yeshua (John 1:14). Our being “under grace” is Paul’s way of saying that, in this direct accountability to God, God may either extend his grace to us or withhold it, on a case by case basis, according to his supreme sense of mercy and justice. Our being “not under law,” (the Greek word here for “under” is *hupo*, meaning “underneath”) connotes that we are no longer “underneath” the Law’s enforcement; that is, we no longer automatically receive the Law’s penalties for disobedience, but there is no doubt that we continue to be (and are now directly) subject to God’s correction and punishment (as well as his praise and reward) when we are deserving of them. Meanwhile, the commandments of *Torah*, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit, retain their relevance in being a main source for our determining God’s Will, but our “obedience” relationship with God is now direct rather than indirect. That is why Paul says in Galatians 5:18:

*“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under [underneath] the law.”*

And similarly, in Galatians 3:24-25:

*“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Messiah, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith [meaning “Messiah”] has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*

What I have said about “grace” thus far has been in response to Paul’s juxtaposing “grace” and “law.” I would, however, be remiss were I not to mention another kind of grace that God never withholds. It is God’s empowerment, through the Holy Spirit, to do as well and as much as God, in his sovereignty, is willing to release us to. So, it would seem, for example, that God always extends grace to a person who seeks his power for obedience, and to do good. We depend on God’s grace to perform his will.

## **2. We are justified by faith and not by the Law, so the deeds of the Law no longer have value.**

In Romans 3:20 and 28, Paul says:

*“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”*

And in Galatians 2:15-16 and 21:

*“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Yeshua the Messiah, even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, that we might be justified by faith in Messiah and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. ...I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Messiah died in vain.”*

These Scriptures and others like them are often quoted to deny the Law’s continuing value in the New Covenant. After all (some think), if righteousness cannot be acquired from performing the deeds of the Law, then why do them? The answer is that, with the power and discernment that the Holy Spirit allows us, we perform the deeds of the Law because they are God’s will—not in order to become righteous and acquire salvation or anything else.

Paul is very clear that no one is justified (i.e. made righteous—saved) through merely obeying commandments. Justification comes only through our reliance on Yeshua’s sacrifice that expunges our sins if we receive him as our savior and repent; that is why Galatians 2:16 states:

*“...a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Yeshua the Messiah...”*

Romans 3:28 says the same thing but differently; it says:

*“...a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”*

None of this contradicts Paul’s contention that God’s Law continues to have value in the New Covenant. We can be certain of this because in Romans 3:31 Paul says:

*“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.”*

### **3. We are now dead to the law, having been delivered from It.**

In Romans 7:4-6, Paul says:

*“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Messiah, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

Also, in Galatians 2:19-20, Paul says:

*“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

The expressions “dead to the law,” “died to the law,” and “delivered from the law” have led many to believe that God’s Law no longer applies to us. That is not at all what Paul is saying.

In Romans 7:4-6, Paul is comparing our relationship with God to the intimate relationship of marriage. Prior to the New Covenant, our “marriage” relationship with God was mostly through our obedience to the statutes of *Torah* because we did not yet have Yeshua’s sacrifice or the Holy Spirit to draw us closer. It was a wonderfully gracious relationship, but God made it even better by sending Yeshua who sacrificed himself for us. This brought us into a “marriage” relationship with Yeshua that was more intimate than our “marriage” relationship through the Law. But because it is not God’s will that we be in two marriages at the same time, Paul explains that we died during our “marriage” to the Law in order to clear the way for our “marriage” to Yeshua. That is what Paul meant when he said:

*“you also have become dead to the law through the body of Messiah, that you may be married to another (Romans 7:4)...”*

And his other saying:

*“I through the law died to the law that I might live to God” (Galatians 2:19).*

Paul’s reference to being “delivered from the Law” and being “held” by the law is a continuation of his metaphor that we have moved from one marriage relationship to another. It is not as some believe—Paul stating that God’s Law held us in bondage. I said “God’s Law” instead of just “law” purposely, in order to illustrate how much easier it is to accept that some nondescript law held us in bondage, than to think that “God’s Law” held us in bondage, which we know cannot be true. Also, Paul’s reference to the “newness of the Spirit” and the “oldness of the letter” is completely consistent with the Scriptures and everything else Paul said because, in the New Covenant, our principal way of relating to God has changed. Paul recognizes our changed relationship to the “Law,” but at no time infers that the *Torah* has been done away with or has been rendered useless.

#### **4. The Mosaic Law is a curse, and those who seek to obey it are under its curse.**

Galatians 3:10-13: *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them. But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them.’ Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree...’)”*

Once again, the words that Paul uses are often misconstrued—in this case, the word “curse,” which some would have us believe means that God’s Law is a curse. No, the curse to which Paul is referring originates in Deuteronomy 30:19, which reads:

*“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live...”*

When these words were spoken by God to Moses, the context was “covering over sin” through obedience to the Law and animal sacrifice. Israel’s choice to either obey the Law and live or disobey and not live was a reference to salvation that, unbeknown to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, would be granted in the future as a result of Yeshua’s sacrifice. Paul’s words paralleling Deuteronomy were spoken many centuries after Sinai under the New Covenant, when our path to salvation had been transitioned from conducting animal sacrifices to having faith in Yeshua, the ultimate sacrifice. Paul was warning the Galatians not to seek to cover over their sins in the old way of obedience to the Law with animal sacrifices, but rather to seek salvation in the new way which was through Yeshua. Not only was the old way no longer authorized but, under it, even a single violation would have resulted in the cursing referred to in Deuteronomy 30:19 that led to death. Paul is clear in Galatians 3:11 (NKJ) that in the New Covenant:

*“no one is justified by the law,”*

and he quotes Habakkuk 2:4 (see also, Romans 1:7 and Hebrews 10:38):

*“the just shall live by his faith.”*

Bottom line: It is not a curse to seek to keep the Law; the curse comes from trying to keep it as a means of acquiring salvation.

##### **5. It no longer matters what we eat or drink, or whether we keep God’s special days.**

Colossians 2:16-17: *“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Messiah.”*

This Scripture is sometimes used to assert that God’s food laws, appointed times, and other special days commanded in Scripture are no longer in effect, and that those who adhere to them are putting themselves back under the “Law of sin and death,” and even denying Yeshua. Now that is a pretty ominous charge for merely resting on the Sabbath and abstaining from pork. To see what is actually being said here, let us widen our search to verses of Scripture that come both before and after:

**Before:** Colossians 2:8: *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Messiah.”*

**After:** Colossians 2:20-22: *“Therefore, if you died with Messiah from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?”*

Notice that the words in verse 16,

*“let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,”*

are sandwiched between verse 8 and verses 20-22 that warn against becoming captive to the traditions, commandments, and doctrines of men. But God's *Torah* regarding permissible foods and how to keep his festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths, are not the traditions of men, so Paul was not, therefore, advocating disregard for the *Torah*. Rather, he was warning us against being in bondage to "fences" that some would place around the *Torah*—rules promulgated by men that are beyond and more stringent than those commanded by God.

## 6. The Mosaic Law was defective and is now obsolete.

Hebrews 8:6-7 and 13: *"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. ...In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."*

These verses of Scripture are sometimes used, in conjunction with others, to assert the Mosaic Law's inadequacy, defectiveness, and obsolescence. But if those making the assertion would look at the Scriptures carefully, they would see that what is being spoken of is the Mosaic Covenant—not the Mosaic Law. A covenant is a relationship—an agreement between parties. The Mosaic Covenant was the relationship that was consummated at Mt. Sinai between God and the Israelites, where God gave the Israelites his Laws (the *Torah*), and the Israelites promised to obey. Well, they did not obey, and they consequently breached the Covenant; the word "breach" and "fault" are the same. The Covenant between God and the Israelites developed a fault that was not intrinsic to the covenant agreement, but rather one that was created by the Israelites' disobedience. We see this clearly in Hebrews 8:8 that says:

*"Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah..."*

Notice how the Scripture says *"finding fault with them..."* The fault was with the Israelites—not in the design of the covenant. And we read in both Hebrews 8:8 and Jeremiah 31:30(31)-31(32) that, rather than God leaving Israel without a covenant (which He could have done and which they deserved), He graciously gave them a New and different covenant that was based on better promises. In the process of doing that, He allowed the First Covenant to gradually pass into oblivion; that is what Paul means by the First Covenant becoming obsolete.

So, do we need to obey the Mosaic Law? Well, yes and no! Part of the Mosaic Law can no longer be complied with because it has lost its covenantal infrastructure. We have no operative Levitical Priesthood, no Jerusalem Temple in which to conduct animal sacrifices, and no unified leadership of Israel. Yeshua should be recognized by everyone as the King of Israel, and his sacrifice as the reason why many commandments connected to the Temple no longer need be (in fact no longer can be performed. Still, there are many commandments that remain doable, but they have now come under New Covenant administration and are subject to New Covenant enforcement. When added to other mandates of the New Covenant, they collectively become what Galatians 6:2 calls "the Law of Messiah."



## **7. The Mosaic Law is a ministry of death, so literal observance of it kills.**

2 Corinthians 3:5-8: *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?"*

Romans 7:6: *"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."*

The 2 Corinthians Scripture refers to the written Law as a "Ministry of Death," and says that "the letter (presumably of the Law) kills." On the one hand it appears to support the view of those who would preach doing away with the Law, yet the Scripture also says that the written Law was glorious—an apparent contradiction. What then is Paul trying to say? Paul is reflecting about the Old Covenant, when the Holy Spirit was not accessible to the average Israelite, and when literal obedience to the Law was indeed the prescribed path to life. But it ceased to be the path to life in the New Covenant when Yeshua's sacrifice gave us direct access to God, and the Holy Spirit was given to us to be the Law's interpreter. So, Paul is warning us that today our approach to God's Law must be through the Holy Spirit and not through mere literal observance. He is warning us that although literal obedience to the Law led us to life in the Old Covenant, by-passing the Holy Spirit to pursue literal obedience in the New Covenant will lead us to death. That is not to say that today the letter of the Law has no application. It does, but the Holy Spirit must give us application.

## **8. The Mosaic Law was done away with by Messiah, so all we need do now is love our neighbor.**

Romans 10:4: *"For Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."*

Galatians 5:14: *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

These Scriptures have occasionally been used to teach that, when Messiah came, he brought an end to God's Law because all God ever wanted was for us to love our neighbor, which is the Law's fulfillment.

Romans 10:4 is easy to explain. Put simply, the word "end" in the verse does not mean "termination of existence," it means "purposeful destination" as in the expression "the end justifies the means." It tells us that Messiah is to whom the Law brings us. As for Galatians 5:14, both the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Yeshua stand for selfless sacrifice as against self-interest. When we "love 'our' neighbor as 'ourselves,'" we fulfill the ultimate of what the Law stands for, but we are not released from obeying God's specific and detailed Commandments. If we were, He would have told us.

## Conclusion

I hope this commentary helps to clear the “elephants” from the room. We can criticize Paul’s choice of words or the translations of his writings, but what we cannot do is believe that Paul would condone the myriad of anti-law statements that have been attributed to him.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Let us keep in mind that the *Torah* (the Pentateuch) that contains the Law of Moses is Scripture and is therefore profitable for all that 2 Timothy says it is. And by the way—take note of who wrote 2 Timothy—***It was Paul!***

—*New King James Bible*

## The Existence and Nature of God

*Delivered October 11, 2008*

We read in Hebrews [5:12-14](#):

*“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

This speaks to all of us who are several years in the faith, and it says that by this time we should already be teachers of others—not ourselves need teaching in the foundations of Scripture and of biblical life. Yet, Paul—I believe it was Paul—was talking to Jewish followers of Yeshua who, like many of us today, needed to re-learn the Bible’s foundational principles, or perhaps even learn them for the first time. What are these principles? [Hebrews 6:1-3](#) gives us these examples:

*“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Messiah, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation (1) of repentance from dead works and (2) of faith toward God, (3) of the doctrine of baptisms, (4) of laying on of hands, (5) of resurrection of the dead, and (6) of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”*

These six elementary principles are very broad and encompass many others in the same way as the first commandment to love God and the second commandment to love our neighbor encompass all the other commandments and the prophets. The elders have discussed this and agree that, for the sake of new believers in our midst and old believers who either forgot the first principles or did not learn them adequately the first time around, we should periodically re-teach them to the entire congregation so that more of us can move on from the milk to the meat.

Now the time-honored way of establishing a curriculum for Messianic Jewish fundamentals would be to appoint a committee that would come up with a draft curriculum, that would then be discussed and amended by the elders, who would then send it back to the committee, that would again discuss it, and so on. After a few such “backs and forths,” a final curriculum would be approved by the elders, probably no sooner than next March.

Well, I do not want to wait until next March to start, and I do not think we have to. I have a pretty good idea of what fundamentals ought to be taught, and some of you do too. So, I am going to begin today by teaching on the nature of God, and I will ask all of you to send the elders topics that you think should be included in the program.

Let us begin. When we call ourselves “believers” in the context of Judaism broadly, we mean we believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Regrettably, not all of today’s Jews believe in God and, in fact, new Jewish groups (e.g. Humanistic Judaism) have popped up in which a majority of their members do not. Doctrinally and historically, Orthodox Jews believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who created the world and everything in it. He is viewed as an indivisible

unity and separate in identity from the expected Messiah. In contrast, Messianic Jews believe God to be a mysterious tri-unity *echad*—a Father who reigns from heaven, the Father’s son who received the name Yeshua when he was born on earth to be our Messiah, and the *Ruach haKodesh* (the Holy Spirit counselor and provider of power) whom Yeshua sent to reside with us and within us after his return to Heaven.

John 14:16-19: “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.*”

John 14:25-26: “*These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*”

John 15:26: “*But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.*”

John 16:7-10: “*Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more...*”

Acts 1:8-9: “*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*”

Christians refer to this mysterious triune God as the “Trinity,” and describe it as “three persons of God in one.” That unfortunate expression “three persons” is responsible for Jews who view God as *yachid*—an absolute unity—leveling the accusation against Messianic Jews that we are idolaters because we worship three gods and, worse than that, that we worship a man whom we call “God.” To summarize, it is fair to say as a comparison and generalization, that Rabbinical Jews worship God whom they consider an absolute unity, while Messianic Jews worship God whom we consider a tri-unity. And while the Rabbinical Jewish world is awaiting the first coming of Messiah whom they are sure will be a completely natural man, Messianic Jews, understand Yeshua the Messiah to have already come—yes as a man, but a man in whom resided the fullness of the deity. Colossians 2:9 says regarding this:

*“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily...”*

Also, John 1:1 says of the Messiah that he was divine and took a major part in the creation of the world:

*John 1:1-3: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”*

And the Scripture goes on to say:

*John 1:4-13: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

Finally, if there is any doubt that the “Word” referred to is none other than Yeshua, John 1:14 makes it clear:

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Still, Yeshua is not God in the sense that he is all of God, since when Yeshua came to the earth, God the Father remained in heaven and in control of all things.

I would now like to back up a little. In all that has been said thus far, we have assumed that God exists, and we have said little regarding why we think so. Well, Psalm 14:1 says in part:

*“Only a fool says in his heart ‘There is no God.’”*

It sounds pretty persuasive, but it is only so if you believe that the Scriptures are true, and a large part of the world does not. So, in proving the existence of God, we have a chicken and egg situation. God provided the Scriptures so that we can know more about him, but we will not believe what Scripture says unless we already believe in him. There was a time when I did not believe in God, nor did I believe in the Scriptures. So, what is the answer? The answer is that at some point, each of us must experience a communication from God that we believe. In regard to this, Romans 1:19-20 assures us that, if we have innocent eyes, we will be assured that God exists through merely observing the creation; it says:

*“What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”*

So why did I not see it for so many years? Romans 1:21-22 has the answer; it says:

*“For although they knew God [meaning that there was a time when, in our innocence we all knew God] they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...”*

That was me alright, and if God hadn't come looking for me and exercised his power to reveal himself, I would still be in that condition. Well, maybe that is more disconcerting than encouraging. Suppose God does not reveal himself to someone. Would it be fair for me to know him and that other person not? I cannot judge God's fairness, and the Scripture we have just read from Romans states that “men are without excuse.” In his book “Growing to Maturity,” our *Tikkun shaliach* Dan Juster puts it this way:

*“In conclusion, we see the Bible teaches human beings are responsible before God because they are capable of knowing He exists and they stand under His Judgment.”*

So, the answer must be that if we want someone whom we know to know God, we need to pray to God to reveal himself to the person and, in addition, we need to try to persuade the person with both Scripture and logic. And Dan said something else in his book that also strikes me; he said:

*“As you read Exodus 20 to 23 and Leviticus 19 you notice God often added these words to His most important moral and social instructions: ‘I am the Lord.’ God's very character stands behind His Law and He will punish those who transgress it.”*

The first and foremost commandment is “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.*” One needs to know God to be able to love him, yet the commandment was given before Yeshua's incarnation and before the *Ruach* was poured out on the world. Intriguing, is it not?

—NKJ

## Faith, Law and Grace

*Delivered May 14, 2016*

We read in Romans 3:28, in the *New International Version of the Bible* (the NIV), that the apostle Paul wrote this to the believers in Rome:

*“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”*

But later on, we read in James 2:24 of the same translation:

*“You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.”*

The first of these Scriptures separates faith from law, and the second one unites them. How do we reconcile these apparently contradictory statements made by two major Apostles? I believe that Dr. David Stern does it very well in his *Jewish New Testament*<sup>18</sup> translation of Romans 3:20 which states:

*“For in his sight no one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands, because what Torah really does is show people how sinful they are.”*

And in Stern’s translation of Romans 3:28 we read:

*“Therefore, we hold the view that a person comes to be considered righteous by God on the ground of trusting, which has nothing to do with legalistic observance of Torah commands.”*

Not being a scholar of Biblical Greek, I cannot certify that Dr. Stern is accurate in translating the Greek word νόμον (*nom 'os*) as “legalistic observance of *Torah*.” However, it makes good sense, and his distinction between what is “law” and what is “legalistic” not only reconciles the apparent contradiction in this case and this translation, but in other cases and other translations of *nom 'os* as well, where the English seems to pit God’s law against his grace. The difference between what is “law” and what is “legalism,” is that “law” infers a correct application of a legal requirement, whereas “legalism” is strict adherence to the letter of a statute while ignoring its spirit and intent. Legalistic interpretation often leads to error, and the simplest way for us to avoid such error is, whenever we encounter a reference to the word “law” in Paul’s writings, we should consider the possibility that a better translation is “legalistic” or “legalism.” It is not always the case, but often it is.

Now, why am I making such a point of this in a *Shabbat* message? It is because mistranslations of Scriptures dealing with faith, law, and grace, are often at the core of why some Christians believe that Messianic Judaism has rejected God’s grace and has put itself “back under the Law.” They are wrong, of course, but it is a serious problem in our relating to our Christian brothers and sisters. Our attention to the application of God’s law in the New Covenant is what makes us distinctive within the wider body of believers who, in many cases, do not understand that their faith in Yeshua is

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. David H. Stern’s *Jewish New Testament* is now incorporated into his larger work, *The Complete Jewish Bible*.

related to the same Law for which they criticize us. Let me illustrate the problem with something posted on the Internet, on “Christian Forums:”

*“For a while now, I’ve heard about the Messianic Judaism denomination. Apparently, they reject many of the traditions of the Christian church, sometimes including the Trinity. They also teach that people should obey the Torah in order to be saved. Most disturbingly, I’ve even heard stories of people becoming so engrossed in Messianic Judaism that they simply convert to Orthodox Judaism and reject Jesus altogether. What do you guys think? Is this just a harmless case of Christians dressing up as Jews? Or should we suggest that these people return to traditional Christianity?”*

At the root of this misinformation, is the kind of faulty translation of Paul’s writings to which I have previously alluded. Sooner or later, each of us here will be asked by someone—a friend, a colleague—to defend our position on faith, law, and grace, and I believe that the Holy Spirit has moved me to guide you in understanding the true meaning and intent of Paul in order to prepare you for it. The way I propose to do that is by comparing how the NIV and the Jewish New Testament translate several of Paul’s difficult sayings, keeping in mind that the NIV is only representative of, and similar to, many other modern translations, and that Stern’s rendering is not always the best either. Stern is, to his credit, unique among other translators by his use of the term “legalism,” where the NIV and most other translations render the Greek word “*nom’os* as “law.” This throws a different light on Paul’s sayings that is sometimes quite helpful, but it does not always result in a fair rendering of the Greek. In those cases, Stern is more of an interpreter than a translator, but his renderings of the Scripture and illumination of Paul are, nevertheless, useful. So, with that caveat in mind, let us explore Paul’s teachings on faith, law, and grace.

We will begin with Romans 3:20, that in the NIV reads:

*“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*

The NIV is correct in saying that mere observance of law does not make a person righteous. If I stop my car at a red light merely because it is the law, I am obedient to the law, but it does not make me righteous. Righteousness does require that I stop at red lights, but any righteous reason for doing so would have to include my concern for the safety of others; merely wanting to comply with the letter of the law is not enough to make me righteous. The problem with the NIV translation of Romans 3:20 is that it can lead one to think that there is no merit in keeping God’s Law. Stern’s translation avoids the possibility of any such misunderstanding by stating:

*“For in his sight no one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands, because what Torah really does is show people how sinful they are.”*

The next Scripture, Romans 6:14, in the NIV reads:

*“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”*



The NIV translation gives the impression that, because of Yeshua, God’s grace exempts us from being subject to his law. One does not have to be a theologian or a Bible translator to realize that such a notion is wrong on its face. If my small child disobeys me (i.e. breaks the law I gave him as his father), I am gracious to forgive him, but he is going to get his rear end tanned if he does it again. One of the problems with the NIV is its unwise translation of the Greek word *ὑπό* (*hoop-o*) as “under,” in the expression “under law.” In English, the word “under” has two meanings. One of its meanings—the wrong one if applied to this Scripture—is “subject to.” By Paul saying that we are not under law, he does not mean that we are not subject to law. *Hoop-o* does indeed mean “under,” but in the sense of being “underneath.” Therefore, what Paul means is that we are “not underneath” the law, as being weighed down or crushed by it.

In an attempt to avoid such a misunderstanding, Stern’s Jewish New Testament translates Romans 6:14:

*“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under legalism but under grace.”*

Stern does not address the word *hoop-o*, and his translation stretches the concept of legalism a bit too far; still, it is not bad in that it avoids treating law as a negative.

The next Scripture we will discuss is Romans 7:6; in the NIV it reads:

*“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”*

This way of translating reads as though we have been released from having to obey God’s law, which is tantamount to saying that we no longer have to obey God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that all Scripture is inspired and is useful for many things, but the NIV seems to say that we now no longer even have to read the Scriptures of the *Torah* because the Spirit is going to tell us what to do. Stern’s translation of Romans 7:6 is much better; it reads:

*“But now we have been released from this aspect of the Torah, because we have died to that which had us in its clutches, so that we are serving in the new way provided by the Spirit and not in the old way of outwardly following the letter of the law.”*

Stern’s fifty-two words to explain Paul is quite a bit more than the twenty words of the Greek, but he is essentially correct.

Moving along, Romans 10:4 in the NIV reads:

*“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”*

The NIV translation is ambiguous as to the meaning of the expression “end of.” “End of” has several meanings, one of them being that what is referred to (in this case “the law”) has ceased to exist. Since the Law of God and the Will of God are synonymous, we know that that cannot be true, so Stern corrects it by translating “end of” as “goal” and he translates Romans 10:4:

*“For the goal at which the Torah aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts.”*

I apologize for the length of this list, but there are several more Scriptures to go. 1 Corinthians 9:20 in the NIV reads:

*“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.”*

Once more, we encounter the Greek word *hoop-o*’ translated “under.” I dealt with this in a prior verse so I will not repeat myself here. Suffice it to say that, according to the NIV, Paul seems to be saying that he is not subject to God’s Law, which we know he would never say. Once more, Stern uses many more words in his translation than are in the Greek in order to properly convey the meaning of 1 Corinthians 9:20; Stern’s translation reads:

*“That is, with Jews, what I did was put myself in the position of a Jew, in order to win Jews. With people in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the Torah, I put myself in the position of someone under such legalism, in order to win those under this legalism, even though I myself am not in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the Torah.”*

Now, turning to the Book of Galatians: Galatians contains four Scriptures that are problematic in the way that the NIV renders them. The first of these, Galatians 2:21, reads:

*“I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”*

Well, this is really not bad, except that it infers that obedience to God’s law has nothing to do with one’s righteousness. Here, I do not like Stern’s use of “legalism...” his translation reads:

*“I do not reject God’s gracious gift; for if the way in which one attains righteousness is through legalism, then the Messiah’s death was pointless.”*

In my opinion, the NIV’s translation of *nom-os*’ as “law” is better, because all that one needs to understand is that one does not become righteous through ritualistic obedience. One becomes righteous through faith—not the other way around—and when a person is righteous, he or she WANTS to obey God’s Law.

The next Scripture: Galatians 3:10-12 in the NIV reads:

*“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.””*

The “curse” that is mentioned here is a reference to Deuteronomy 27:26 that reads in the NIV:

*“Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”*

When Paul wrote what is recorded in Galatians 3:10-12, he was referencing the Mosaic Covenant, under which an Israelite’s justification was so dependent on literal obedience to the Law that anyone who failed to observe even the least of its statutes was cursed. But Paul wrote what he did centuries later, at a time of transition when the New Covenant had already come but the Temple’s sacrificial system was still operative. Paul was saying to the Jewish believers in Galatia: *“Continue to obey the Law by performing the sacrifices, but no longer rely on them for your justification; instead, rely on your faith in Messiah Yeshua.”*

As correct as Paul was, some Christians quote translations (including the NIV in Galatians 3:12) that say that the Law is not based on faith. They do this, in order to be able to say that anyone (Messianic Jews in mind) who tries to keep any part of the Mosaic Law is abrogating his or her faith in Yeshua. The Jewish New Testament remedies the translational problem of portraying the law as bad, but oh how many words Stern uses in order to do it. Stern’s translation reads:

*“For everyone who depends on legalistic observance of Torah commands lives under a curse, since it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not keep on doing everything written in the Scroll of the Torah.’ Now it is evident that no one comes to be declared righteous by God through legalism, since ‘The person who is righteous will attain life by trusting and being faithful.’ Furthermore, legalism is not based on trusting and being faithful, but on [a misuse of] the text that says, ‘Anyone who does these things will attain life through them.’ The Messiah redeemed us from the curse pronounced in the Torah by becoming cursed on our behalf; for the Tanakh says, ‘Everyone who hangs from a stake comes under a curse.’”*

Two more Scriptures to go: Galatians 5:4 in the NIV reads:

*“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”*

The problem with translating in this way is that justification by faith (of which the Scripture approves) “is” justification by law—New Covenant law—the law of faith. Stern’s translation is better; it reads:

*“You who are trying to be declared righteous by God through legalism have severed yourselves from the Messiah! You have fallen away from God’s grace!”*

Here too, it is not necessary for Stern to change terminology from “law” to “legalism,” but what he says is, nevertheless, correct.

Finally, Galatians 5:18 in the NIV states:

*“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.”*

Again, an unwise translation of the Greek word *hoop-o*’ that leads one to improperly conclude that, if one is led by the Holy Spirit, one is not subject to God’s law. Well, I hope that by this time the thought of such a thing does not ring true and that I do not have to remind you that, in the New Covenant, we are no longer talking about statutes of law (as under Moses), but rather about the will of God which is, in fact, his Law. Stern’s translation correctly states:

*“But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not in subjection to the system that results from perverting the Torah into legalism.”*

Here again though, Stern’s switch from “law” to “legalism” is not needed for us to correctly understand what Paul is saying.

Earlier in this message I read to you an inquiry concerning Messianic Judaism that appeared on “Christian Forums.” Here is my answer to it:

“Dear Forum inquirer:

I have been heavily involved in Messianic Judaism for the last thirty-nine years and can tell you from personal experience that Messianic Jews and Gentiles that join us do not reject the Trinity; we completely buy into the biblical truth that God exists as the Father, his Son Jesus (we call him by his Hebrew name “Yeshua”), and the Holy Spirit.

We do not reject evangelical Christian traditions as being wrong, but we choose to not observe some of them for cultural reasons. We derive our religious practices from those that are commanded (or at least exemplified) in Scripture, and from Jewish tradition so long as the tradition does not conflict. So, for example, we do not celebrate Christmas in the way that Christians do, but we seriously and reverently study the Scriptures that tell of Yeshua’s birth. Likewise, we do not celebrate Yeshua’s resurrection on the day that Christians call Easter; instead, we celebrate his resurrection in connection with Passover and the Day of Firstfruits according to the biblical sequence of events. One Christian tradition that we do follow is taking the bread and wine of communion, and, in my congregation, we pray the Lord’s Prayer every Sabbath. Of course, many of our practices are culturally Jewish, such as praying traditional prayers in Hebrew and reading Hebrew Scriptures from a handwritten *Torah* scroll of parchment.

We Messianic Jews and the Gentiles that join us do not seek to obey the *Torah* in order to be saved. Our view of salvation is no doubt the same as yours, which is that it comes through repenting, and receiving Yeshua as Messiah (i.e. Lord and Savior). The fact is, no one today can keep the commandments of *Torah* literally in the same way as the Israelites who lived during the time of Moses; we do not have the Temple, or a functioning Levitical priesthood, or animal sacrifices. Nevertheless, we are confident that all Scripture is inspired by God, and is valuable for teaching, convicting of sin, correcting our faults, and training in right living (we know that from [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)), and we therefore look to the Holy Spirit for guidance as to the Scripture’s application.

Regrettably, there have been occasions where persons connected to Messianic Judaism initially confessed Yeshua and later disavowed him and either joined or returned to a traditional synagogue. They are few and far between—not unlike those who confess Jesus within the Church, and later disavow him and join heretical cults or return to secular unbelief.”

Well, what do you think? Did I answer our inquirer adequately? I hope so, and I thank the Holy Spirit for giving me this message.

—CJB

## Faith, Scripture and the Holy Spirit

*Delivered January 4, 2014*

Most of us have been taught that believing in God requires faith. I would like to challenge that view and suggest, instead, that having faith requires that we first believe in God. I want to repeat what I have just said so that you may absorb it before I proceed. I am of the opinion that believing in God does not require faith, but that it is the other way around—having faith requires that we first believe in God.

If I am right about this, many of us are standing on very shaky ground in both our faith and our belief in God because we are basing our belief in God on what some call “blind faith,” a concept that is found nowhere in the Bible. “Faith” yes, but “blind faith” no. Let us think about this for a minute. Blind faith means believing in something without there being a rational reason for doing so. Here are some statements about “blind faith” that I found at the source of all reliable knowledge—the Internet: 😊

“Blind faith” is faith based on no experience.

“Blind faith” is belief that lacks concrete evidence.

“Blind faith” is belief without true understanding, perception, or discrimination.

“Blind Faith” is an English blues rock band...”

Now let us see what the Bible actually teaches about faith. The King James and New King James Versions translate [Hebrews 11:1](#) this way:

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

The New American Standard translates it:

*“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*

The Bible’s definition of faith is at odds with their being such a thing as blind faith because the Bible says that for there to be faith there must be evidence and conviction. Merely believing in a thing is not enough; there must be evidence and conviction. Blind faith is therefore a contradiction in terms because in blind faith there is no evidence. Also, conviction that is based on no evidence, i.e. on nothing except what we have been told to believe, leads to weak belief which falls short of conviction, and therefore cannot be true faith!

*Pursuing this further, according to the Bible, the evidence (or the conviction) that is required of us in order to have faith is of things that are “not seen.” What kind of evidence is there that we cannot see but that leads us to an assurance of something? I know of nothing other than having an encounter with God (whom we cannot see) who tells us that something is true. Yeshua said to his disciple Thomas in John 20:29 (NKJ):*

*“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

If we experience God telling us something, that is enough to give us conviction! Communication from God is the evidence, and it comes through the Holy Spirit.

Now, if that is so, we must come to believe in God before we can have faith. Hebrews 11:6 in the New King James Version of the Bible says:

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

The same verse, rendered in the Complete Jewish Bible, states:

*“And without trusting, it is impossible to be well pleasing to God, because whoever approaches him must trust that he does exist and that he becomes a Rewarder to those who seek him out.”*

So, once again, believing in God has to come before having faith, for as I have just read: *“whoever approaches him must [already] trust that he does exist...”* (I added the word “already”).

There are too many believers who say they have faith, but do not recall ever having been spoken to by God. The result is that they are continually reassessing and straining to maintain their beliefs and are not on solid ground.

Believing in God with conviction can come about in two ways. The first is the way I have already mentioned, which is that God visits us personally through the Holy Spirit. The other way is spoken of in Romans 1:18-20; in the New King James Version, we read:

*“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...”*

This other way to come to believe in God is to see God’s attributes in his creation—a creation that is so profound as to make God’s existence a certainty, and his non-existence unthinkable.

Once we are certain that God exists, we are open to having faith. But faith for what? According to Scripture, it is only for what God reveals to be his will. So, once again, we need to hear from God for that which we have faith, or else our belief in whatever it is we believe will not be faith—it will be presumption. Returning to Hebrews 11:6:

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him...”*

Making a logical substitution of words we get:

*“But without hearing from God, it is impossible to please Him...”*

And also, Romans 10:17:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

Being in communication with God through the Holy Spirit—hearing his still small voice with which he most often speaks to us is immensely helpful to our believing in God’s existence and to our having faith that whatever his will is will come to pass.

Now I want to change gears. You probably have noticed that I rely on Scripture quite a bit for what I believe and profess. That is because I believe that the Word of God is conveyed through the Scriptures. I have faith that the Bible was given to us and is inspired by God. I do not point to my bound Bible and say: “This is the Word of God” because my Bible (and yours) is only one translation among many of ancient documents that have gone through scribal transmissions and canonizations. Why then do I believe that the Bible that has come down to me through the ages is reliable? It is because I have heard the voice of God on the matter. Those of you who have heard my testimony of how I became a believer know that God spoke to me and, in a moment, I went from being an atheist to believing that God exists. At that moment I did not know who Yeshua was, and God directed me—no, he compelled me—to search for the answer in the Holy Scriptures. I found the answer in the Scriptures, but it took a second visitation by God to show me that what I was reading was true. So, that is why I have faith for the Bible’s inspiration and foundational inerrancy despite its many translations into English.

But that was my encounter with God—not yours or anyone else’s, and I want to find ways to convince others that the Bible really is from God—others who might not have had the same experience as I. Believing in the Bible’s godly origin and inspiration is very important because it is the only source I know that teaches us who God is, what God is like, how God created us, what He wants from us, and how He has related to man throughout the ages. The benefit of believing the Bible is immense because, when we believe it, we become a receiver of the knowledge and wisdom of the ages that enhances our lives beyond measure.

Having God-instilled faith is the best way to come to believe that the Bible is from God, but there are also some arguments that can be made that are pretty convincing. One of them is the improbability that man alone could have created a compilation of 66 books, written over a span of thousands of years by men of diverse circumstances and in several languages that are in almost complete harmony with each other. Then there is the witness of the Bible’s almost universal acknowledgement by humanity. Even peoples historically at odds with one another have adopted the same Bible as their guide for moral life. On the negative side, in some political quarters the Bible has been deemed of such a danger that its possession and use has been banned. No other book in history has received such worldwide attention and circulation as has the Bible.

An argument for the Bible’s divine inspiration that I find convincing involves the number of predictive Messianic and other prophecies contained in the *Tanakh* that, centuries later, were fulfilled in the *B’rit Chadashah*. I am sure everyone here knows some of them—prophecies concerning the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34)), Yeshua’s birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:1(2)), his entering Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), his crucifixion (Psalms 22:1-



32(31) and Zechariah 12:10), the timing of his death related to the Temple's destruction (Daniel 9:24-26), and his resurrection (Psalms 16:8-11). Peter saw this, and testified to it in his second epistle (2 Peter 1:16-21 CJB), in which he said:

*“For when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, we did not rely on cunningly contrived myths. On the contrary, we saw his majesty with our own eyes. For we were there when he received honor and glory from God the Father; and the voice came to him from the grandeur of the Sh’khinah, saying, “This is my son, whom I love; I am well pleased with him!” We heard this voice come out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. Yes, we have the prophetic Word made very certain. You will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark, murky place, until the Day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts. First of all, understand this: no prophecy of Scripture is to be interpreted by an individual on his own; for never has a prophecy come as a result of human willing—on the contrary, people moved by the Ruach HaKodesh spoke a message from God.”*

Peter knew of the Bible's prophecy in Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 28:64 that Israel would be dispersed among the nations, but he did not live to see Israel's re-gathering that was predicted in Ezekiel 36:33-36 and 38:8 and especially in Jeremiah 16:14-15:

*“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that it shall no more be said, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers.”*

Peter did not see it, but we (you and I) have seen it in the restoration of *Eretz Yisrael*.

I am also impressed at the New Testament's predictions of the end times that I see unfolding before my eyes. One regrettable prediction is found in 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

*“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.”*

Do you see it? I see it!

Now I realize that we cannot look to the Bible to prove itself, but I find it significant that the more recent books of the Bible authenticate the earlier books. For example, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we read:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

When Paul says: “*all Scripture*,” he means the *Tanakh* which was the Bible used by him and his contemporaries.

To summarize, believing in God is not acquired through faith. We must believe in God in order to have faith and, despite the many impressive “proofs” of the Bible, it is mainly through communication by the Holy Spirit that we believe the Bible is the Word of God and the infallible guide for our lives. I heard someone say it this way which I think is worth repeating:

*“I know that the Bible is God’s Word because the Holy Spirit dwelling within me tells me so. It’s not something I can describe. All I can say is that when I read the Word of God, it all makes perfect sense to me.”*

—NKJ

## Firstfruits and Resurrection

*Delivered on April 23, 2011*

Now that the sun is low in the west and we have concluded *Shabbat* with *Havdalah*, we find ourselves assembled on *Yom HaBikkurim* or “the day of Firstfruits.” In the Bible, *Bikkurim* is closely associated with Passover, the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, and another firstfruit day, the spring harvest celebration of *Shavuot*. *Bikkurim* is described and commanded in [Leviticus 23:5-14](#) this way:

*“On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD’S Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.” And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.’”*

We no longer have the Temple in which we can bring our “firstfruit” offering, but the day of *Bikkurim* has far from lost its significance. First, some believe it is the very day that Yeshua was resurrected from the dead following his crucifixion; I will show you why later. Second, it is the day from which we begin “counting the *omer*” to *Shavuot*, when the Holy Spirit first made himself available to all on earth who would receive him.

In a way, I did not pick the subject of this message; the subject picked me because we are holding this service in the evening hours instead of on *Shabbat* morning in order to capture both *Shabbat* and *Bikkurim* in a single holy convocation. Given my “druthers” I may not have chosen to speak about *Bikkurim* because it is a subject with some technical complexities that might be better dealt with in a classroom rather than as a preaching from the *bima*. Even the day on which it occurs is controversial and not uniformly agreed upon by Jewish scholars. So, kindly bear with me as I begin by discussing some of the technicalities surrounding *Bikkurim* because, for Jews and especially for Messianic Jews, they are important. Later I will return to discuss aspects of firstfruits and later fruits that are less technical and more clearly connected to our hope in Yeshua and to our daily lives.

The Leviticus Scripture we just read says that *Chag HaBikkurim* occurs on the “day after the Sabbath,” but it does not say which Sabbath. Is the Sabbath *Nissan 15* or *21*, the first or last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread? According to Scripture, they are both Sabbaths (days of rest). Or perhaps it is the weekly Sabbath that precedes, falls during, or follows the Feast of Unleavened

Bread? Of these possibilities, the two within the Jewish world that are in contention as being the Sabbath that is meant are *Nisan 15* and the seventh-day Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. I hope to show you that it is the seventh-day Sabbath and not the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Nisan* unless they coincide. In this regard, I agree with the Sadducees of old rather than with the Pharisees or with Rabbinical Judaism. Leviticus 23:15-21 describes the counting of the *omer* this way:

*“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD. And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD. Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.”*

Each way of reckoning the day of *Chag HaBikkurim* (Firstfruits) has its own logic and virtue. From the Pharisaic or Rabbinical point of view, counting from *Nisan 16* is good because, then, *Shavuot* always falls on the sixth of *Sivan*—an easy calendar remembrance. I suspect that it is also thought of as good because if *Bikkurim* always falls on *Nisan 16* it cannot be shown to coincide with Yeshua’s resurrection—something the Rabbinical community would prefer not to do.

Although our congregation acknowledges the Pharisaic and Rabbinic date culturally, we believe that the Sadducees were correct in placing *Bikkurim* on the day after the seventh-day Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That way of looking at it always places *Yom HaBikkurim* on the first day of the week—Sunday, but of course Sundays fall on different calendar days of the month each year which is somewhat inconvenient.

This way of counting has two virtues, however. First, it is consistent with the Scripture’s reliance on the solar rather than the lunar calendar. Does this surprise you? Well consider that, according to Scripture, the count to *Shavuot* is not only fifty days—it is also seven Sabbaths, and the weekly Sabbath is determined by the sun—not by the moon. Just to remind you, Leviticus 23:15-16 says:

*“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.”*

Now the “seventh Sabbath” spoken of in verse 16 is clearly a weekly Sabbath, so by what logic would the Sabbath in verse 11, just five verses earlier, mean the festival Sabbath of *Nisan 15*? There is no logic to such a switch of meaning. That is why I and those who agree with me have adopted the Sadducean way of dating *Bikkurim* and not the other.

If you are now convinced that *Bikkurim* or Firstfruits always falls on the first day of the week—a Sunday close in time to when Yeshua was crucified and you remember that his tomb was found empty on the first day of the week, the obvious thought that springs to mind is that perhaps the day of Firstfruits is also the day of Yeshua’s resurrection. Let us get a feel for that day long ago by reading the Bible’s account of it in Matthew 28:1-10:

*“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Miryam Magdalene and the other Miryam came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Yeshua who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.” So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Yeshua met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Yeshua said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.””*

So, this is the account of Yeshua’s resurrection, but what has it to do with Firstfruits? 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 shows that it is the firstfruits of our own future resurrection—the resurrection of the saints:

*“But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah’s at His coming.”*

This connection of “firstfruits” to Yeshua’s resurrection becomes even more significant when we consider that the Sadducean way of counting fifty-days to when the Holy Spirit fell on *Shavuot* is not from a mere date on the lunar calendar, but possibly from the very day that Yeshua was resurrected from the dead. I doubt that the Sadducees thought in these terms but, as for the dating of their count, they were probably right.

Let us now turn our attention to the meaning of firstfruits themselves. The firstfruits of a fruit tree are not necessarily better fruits but they are “first,” and a question we should ask ourselves if it is our tree, is what we should do with the fruits. If your understanding is that the fruits are owned by us because we grew them, then I suppose we can do with them what we want to and we would no doubt either eat them or sell them. The Bible has something else to say about it, however because, in the Mosaic Covenant, God required that our firstfruits (at one point even our firstborn children) be given to him or to the Temple priests who ministered in his behalf. Consider the words of Numbers 3:12-13:

*“Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I*

*sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD.”*

And Exodus 23:19:

*“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.”*

And Proverbs 3:9-10:

*“Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.”*

The lesson Scripture teaches is that the product of our labors and all we possess (even our children) are from God, and ultimately belong to God and not to ourselves. Giving God the first of our increase is a clear reminder of that.

Another biblical truth about firstfruits is that they tend to predict what the later fruits will be like. Speaking of the Messiah and also Israel, we read in Romans 11:16:

*“For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.”*

Also, in Romans 8:22-23, we read:

*“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”*

So, we who are Yeshua’s disciples are said to have the firstfruits of the Spirit and, not only that, we are firstfruits ourselves, for in James 1:17-18, we read:

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”*

I want to stay with this idea for a moment and challenge each of us to consider in what way we are a “kind of firstfruits of God’s creatures,” and whether our fruits are the kind He wants to reproduce in others. We are helped in evaluating our fruits by comparing them with Galatians 5:22-25:

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Messiah’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”*

Notice the connection of our belonging to Messiah, bearing his fruit, and crucifying our flesh. We are not going to be crucified the way that he was, but we are, nevertheless, destined to share both his crucifixion and his resurrection.

The quintessential “firstfruit” is, of course, the Messiah himself who I maintain, rose from the dead on this very day of *Bikkurim* to be the hope and promise of our own resurrection at whatever time is appointed to each of us. Yeshua’s resurrection is foundational to our faith and to his being the son of God and deity himself. Had Yeshua died as a mortal and not risen as an immortal, he could not be who Scripture says he is, and we cannot look forward to being resurrected either. Yeshua’s resurrection provides assurance that the Scriptures are true and that faith in him, coupled with repentance, results in forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with God. 1 Corinthians 15:13-19 says it this way:

*“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Messiah is not risen. And if Messiah is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Messiah, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Messiah is not risen. And if Messiah is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Messiah have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Messiah, we are of all men the most pitiable.”*

So, today is “resurrection day,” *Yom HaBikkurim*, and “day one” of our fifty-day “count of the omer” to *Shavuot*. This year let us not reflect only on Yeshua’s firstfruits, but also on our own for, as “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures,” we too have things of value to impart to the world, and they are our visible lives modeled after his. And just as we commemorate Yeshua’s resurrection, let us also have faith for our own when God will one day receive us in Heaven and say to us: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

—NKJ

## Generational Sin

*Delivered February 23, 2008*

Today we heard readings from the *Torah parashah* called *Ki Tissa*, and we heard a *d'rash* on Exodus 34:5-7. I want to read those verses to you again, and then discuss them from a somewhat different point of view:

*“Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”*”

The Scripture says that the Lord God is merciful. We like to hear that because we know there are times that we need his mercy. It says that He is gracious. We like to hear that too, because it comforts us to know that we receive blessings from him though we are not deserving. It says that God is longsuffering. That is really good to know because if He were not, He would have destroyed us long ago on account of our sin. The Scriptures also tell us that God is abounding in goodness and truth. That is really good to know as well because He’s our moral compass; without God, there would be no way to know right from wrong. As a matter of fact, without God’s virtue there would be no distinction between right and wrong. Murdering someone—not murdering someone—it would be all the same.

Even before Yeshua came to die for our sins, God had a plan for forgiving sin that was to be accomplished through Yeshua in the future. Remember that Yeshua was the *logos* who was there in the beginning. Also, the Lord God is just, for we see from the Exodus Scripture that He does not disregard the sins of the guilty. But then comes the hard saying in verse 7:

*“...visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”*

This saying seems hard indeed, and to Americans like we who are accustomed to being accountable for our own conduct and not that of our parents’ it seems unfair! But let us not go there because our American ways are not God’s ways.

But why would God say such a thing? I want to know, because I love my children and my grandchildren, and do not want anything bad to happen to them on my account. Can it be that because of my sin, past, present and yes, even future, that my children are cursed? That the die has been cast for them and they are doomed to be punished for what I have done? I have heard it taught that way, but I will show you, through Scripture, that it is not so.

Let us explore this a bit. First, the Hebrew words in verse 7 translated in the New King James Version as “*visiting the iniquity of,*” are “*pokeid avon.*” Pay attention now, because you are about to see a good example of why we ought not to accept English translations of Scripture without subjecting them to scrutiny.



The King James and New King James Versions translate the Hebrew words “*pokeid avon*” as “visiting the iniquity of.” The NIV translates them “he punishes,” and Stern’s Complete Jewish Bible translates them “but causing the negative effects of.” Notice that they are all different. The NIV and Stern translations attribute a punitive or negative meaning to the words while the King James and New King James give it a meaning that is more neutral. By neutral, I mean that “visiting something on someone” merely means that you are causing a person to encounter it. It is not necessarily negative.

Looking now at the word “*avon*,” it is translated “iniquity” in the King James and New King James, “offenses” in Stern’s translation, and “sin” in the NIV.

All three are different so, as a believer who wants to understand what is being said and one who is not a Hebrew scholar, I have to decide which of these English translations is best.

I immediately eliminate the NIV translation that says:

*“...he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”*

The reason I strike the NIV from consideration is that it conflicts with its own translation of both Deuteronomy 24:16, and also Ezekiel 18:20. Deuteronomy 24:16 in the NIV says:

*“Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.”*

And Ezekiel 18:20 in the NIV says:

*“The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son.”*

Those are both in conflict with saying that “*he punishes the children for the sins of the fathers.*” So, the NIV is out.

Now I turn to the Stern translation. It says:

*“...but causing the negative effects of the parents’ offenses to be experienced by their children and grandchildren, and even by the third and fourth generations.”*

That’s not bad except for the gratuitous word “negative,” but I am inclined to receive it because if a father’s sin affects his children and grandchildren in any way, it is likely to be negative.

There are a number of other passages of Scripture such as Numbers 14:18 that use parallel language, and two identical Scriptures that, in almost all modern translations, add the phrase “*of those who hate Me.*” These seem to indicate that the children of fathers who hate God will have iniquity visited on their children regardless of whether the children are themselves guilty. The Scriptures to which I am referring are Exodus 20:5-6 and Deuteronomy 5:9-10, and they read almost identically in the NKJ as follows:

*“...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on [upon] the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”*

Do you catch why saying the “generations of those who hate me” refers to the fathers who hate God? It is because they—the fathers—produce the generations.

But once again, all is not what it seems from English translations because the Hebrew word underlying the phrase “of those who hate me” is “*l’snay*.” The vowel under the *lamed* of “*l’snay*” is a *shvah*, so the Scriptures I just read can and probably should have been translated “*to those who hate me*,” rather than “*of those who hate me*.” What this means is that the fathers’ sins will only be visited on those sons who themselves hate God (i.e. are disobedient). Sons who love God and live repentant lives will not have to worry about these Scriptures affecting them. Jay P. Green’s “Literal Translation of the Bible” agrees with me (or I with him) on this, that [Exodus 20:5](#) should be translated “*to those who hate Me*” but then, regrettably, he is not consistent in his own translation of [Deuteronomy 5:9](#).

I found a beautifully clear explanation of all this in Abraham Cohen’s commentary on [Exodus 20:5](#) found in the Hertz *Chumash*:

*“visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. The Torah does not teach here or elsewhere that the sins of the guilty fathers shall be visited upon their innocent children. The soul that sinneth it shall die proclaims the Prophet Ezekiel. And in the administration of justice by the state, the Torah distinctly lays down, ‘the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin’ (Deut. 24:16). However, human experience all too plainly teaches the moral interdependence of parents and children. The bad example set by a father frequently corrupts those that come after him. His most dreadful bequest to his children is not a liability to punishment, but a liability to the commission of fresh offences. In every parent, therefore, the love of God, as a restraining power from evil actions, should be reinforced by love for his children; that they should not inherit the tendency to commit, and suffer the consequences of, his transgressions.”*

Now to really imbed this in our minds, let us do a short Bible study of [Ezekiel 18:4-32](#), but remembering that its reference to dying for violating statutes is referring to the Mosaic Covenant.

*“Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die.” (verse 4).*

So that’s plain. Each person’s conduct determines his own destiny.

*“But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right; if he has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbor’s wife, nor approached a woman during her impurity; if he has not oppressed anyone, but has restored to*

*the debtor his pledge; has robbed no one by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; if he has not exacted usury nor taken any increase, but has withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man; if he has walked in My statutes And kept My judgments faithfully—he is just; he shall surely live!” says the Lord GOD.” (verses 5-9).*

Again, a person’s righteous conduct of obeying God results in life for that person. We continue:

*“If he begets a son who is a robber or a shedder of blood, who does any of these things and does none of those duties,” (verses 10-11).*

So now we’re talking about a righteous father who has an unrighteous son.

*“but has eaten on the mountains or defiled his neighbor’s wife; if he has oppressed the poor and needy, robbed by violence, not restored the pledge, Lifted his eyes to the idols, or committed abomination; if he has exacted usury or taken increase—shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.” (verses 12-13).*

So, an unrighteous son of a righteous father will die for his sin, and his father’s righteousness will not save him. We continue:

*“If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise...” (verse 14).*

The story continues with the unrighteous son himself having a son, but his son is righteous.

*“who has not eaten on the mountains, or lifted his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbor’s wife; has not oppressed anyone, nor withheld a pledge, nor robbed by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; who has withdrawn his hand from the poor and not received usury or increase, but has executed My judgments and walked in My statutes—he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live!” (verses 15-17).*

So once again, the righteous son lives despite the sin of his father, but we are reminded of what happens to the father.

*“As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother by violence, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.” (verse 18).*

So, the father dies for his sins. Then Scripture anticipates that someone will object and claim that the son should be held responsible for his father’s sins. Kind of marked through a family curse. But God says NO! Let us read further:

*“Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?’ Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” (verses 19-20).*

Speaking through Ezekiel, God makes it plain that each person (the father and the son) is responsible for his own conduct, and neither will die for the sins of the other. Continuing with verse 21:

*“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”*

The subject has now changed to the wicked man who repents, and we see that his repentance will save him.

*“None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. ‘Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’ says the Lord GOD, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’” (verses 22-23)*

God is saying that he wants to encourage—not discourage—wicked men to repent. That He would rather that wicked men repent and live than that mere justice be done and they die. But now the opposite—when a righteous man casts away his mantle of righteousness:

*“But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.” (verse 24)*

Wait! That’s not fair! What about everything I did that was good before I turned bad? Verses 25-28 anticipates this question and answers it:

*“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”*

We had better watch it now, because in verses 29-32, God seems to be getting upset!

*“Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord GOD. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions*

*which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, 'says the Lord GOD. 'Therefore turn and live!''*

That is the bottom line, and thus ends our Ezekiel Bible Study. Every one of us will be judged according to our own righteousness or unrighteousness, and a life of righteousness will not counteract one ounce of unrepentant sin. No credit is given for being good if we turn bad. On the other hand, if we sin and repent, God will forgive us.

So, what practical lessons can we learn from this *parashah*? First of all, if we are a father or mother and are tempted to sin, we ought to reflect on how unkind we are being to our children and grandchildren who, as Cohen says, may inherit the tendency (I prefer “the opportunity”) to commit the same sin. And if we are a child, grandchild, or great grandchild of someone we know has committed a particular sin, we shouldn't bewail our being under a curse and go around trying to break generational curses. Instead, we should guard ourselves against falling into sin through similar temptations that beset our parent, grandparent, or great grandparent, and be confident that with Yeshua and the Holy Spirit we can have victory over our temptations to sin. However, if we blow it and we do sin, let us be encouraged that if we repent, we will be forgiven, and our sin will not be remembered.

—NKJ

## God Is Relational

*Delivered to Ohev Yisrael November 2, 2008*

This is the fourth teaching in our series on “The Foundations of Our Messianic Jewish Faith.” The first teaching was “The Nature and Identity of God.” The second was “The Background and Practice of *Sukkot*.” The third was last week’s teaching—“Achieving Spirituality,” and today is the fourth, the title of which is “God is Relational.”

Because the Bible tells us to praise God for who He is, most foundational teaching series try to describe “who he is” under the heading: “Attributes” or “Characteristics of God.” Tozer, a Christian theologian, in his treatise “Knowledge of the Holy,” listed eighteen attributes of God that are often quoted; they are:

- *Wisdom* is God’s perfect understanding, and ability to know how to apply what is right and true. It follows, then, that God cannot make mistakes rooted in imperfection.
- *Infinitude* is God’s boundless and never-ending largeness in space, in time, in all other dimensions of existence, and in all of his attributes. Whatever attributes God has are infinite, as well as other attributes of his person.
- *Sovereignty* is God’s absolute right to create, and to have control over, and to rule all of existence.
- *Holiness* is God’s separateness distinct identity—separate from his creation. He is the source of all things that are created, and He remains aloof and separate from his creation. State another way, although we are created in God’s image, no part of us is him.
- *Trinity* is God revealed as three in one. Three what? There is no answer to that question, but surely not three Gods. Three persons? That sounds like three Gods. There have been many attempts to explain this, but it defies explanation.
- *Omniscience* is God’s perfect and complete knowledge, so that He has no need, nor can He learn anything, because there is nothing to learn beyond what He already knows.
- *Faithfulness* is God’s trustworthiness, that anything He communicates is true, and anything He promises will happen.
- *Love* is God’s care for, and desire to provide the best for his creation. We don’t know what that meant before the creation, but God’s love is active and sacrificial, not devoid of emotion, but not governed by it either. Scripture says that we love because He first loved us. Love is so foundational to all of God’s other attributes, that John wrote in *1 John 4:8*: “God is Love.”
- *Self-existence* is what God meant when He answered Moses in *Exodus 3:14*: “I am who I am. . . .” “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” It is a difficult concept because, except for what God created, nothing else exists. Consequently, you cannot understand God’s existence by comparing him to some other existence. He is everything—the beginning and the end. God always existed, and will forever exist, independent of all else.
- *Self-sufficiency* means that God needs nothing—never has, and never will. All other beings that have needs, satisfy their needs from God’s resources. God cannot improve because He is perfect in all ways. Although God has no needs, it is clear that He has desires, and we are part of fulfilling his desires.

- *Justice is God's perfect harmony with the morality of his truth; it is that quality of God that gives and withholds according to what one deserves. Here again, without invoking God's creation, it is hard to talk about God's justice except to say that God is just—that justice is part of his very being.*
- *Immutability means that God never changes. Hebrews 13:8 says "Yeshua the Messiah is the same yesterday, today, and forever."*
- *Mercy is God's attribute of having compassion for those of his creation who do not deserve blessing. God is not only merciful; He is the embodiment of mercy.*
- *Eternity means that God has always existed and will always exist. Eternity may be thought of as the infinity of time (or the absence of time) where God resides.*
- *Goodness cannot be defined except as the opposite of "badness." God and his attributes are, by definition, good, and everything else is not good. So, if you want to know what "good" is, don't try to define it—just look at God.*
- *Graciousness is unmerited favor; and is related to mercy in that the recipient does not deserve either.*
- *Omnipresence is God's ability to be everywhere at the same time.*

This list is but one of the many compilations of God's attributes. Other attributes we may come across will mention that God is a provider, a healer, that He is wrathful, jealous, comforting, a creator, and life-giving.

Another approach to learning about God would be to look at the many descriptive names of God. But this is enough for now, since the only reason I introduced these attributes to you is to show you how they apply to the one that I really want to talk about today and that Tozer did not list; it is the relational attribute of God.

I think of God's relational attribute as his main attribute. Why do I say that? It is because, except for four of the attributes I mentioned, all the others require some kind of relationship, either within God himself or with his created beings. The attributes that can stand apart are wisdom, infinitude, omniscience, and immutability. All the rest require relationships.

Let us begin with God's tri-unity; we read in Scripture that He exists as the Father who seems to remain in heaven, his son who travels a bit but spends most of his time with his Father, and the Holy Spirit who seems to be everywhere. When the Son came to earth as Yeshua our Messiah, the Father spoke fondly of him:

Matthew 3:16-17: *"When he had been baptized, Yeshua came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. "And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

That shows that the Father had a relationship with his son Yeshua. And Yeshua likewise spoke about his relationship with his Father; Yeshua said in John 10:29-30:

*“My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.”*

And in John 5:19-20 Yeshua also said:

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what he sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.”*

This affectionate talking by the Father about his son and the Son about his father is relationship. We don’t get that familial feeling about the Holy Spirit, but rather the feeling that the Spirit is a servant of both the Father and the Son. When he was about to be taken up to be with his Father, Yeshua said of the Holy Spirit in John 16:7-9:

*“ Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me.”*

The plural nature of God is seen in many places in the Scriptures, even in Genesis 1:26 where God refers to himself as “us,” and “our:”

*“Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth.””*

Let us run through some of the other attributes of God more quickly.

- God’s sovereignty suggests the relationship between a king and his subjects. What does it mean to be a sovereign if there is no one to rule over?
- Holiness means being set apart for God. We can aspire to that (because we are not God himself), but what does it mean to say that God is holy? Can He be set aside for himself? Well, yes, if you remember that the Son Yeshua was holy unto his Father. So, holiness suggests two relationships—God with himself, and us with God (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16)
- God’s Faithfulness suggests a relationship between the Father, Yeshua, and the Holy Spirit, all of whom who work together and trust one another. It also suggests a relationship with us, where numerous times, Scripture urges us to trust God because He is faithful. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to:  
*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”*
- God’s self-existence suggests a relationship with others who are not self-existing, but who must rely on God for their identities



- God's self-sufficiency means that He needs nothing, but it is brought up in Scripture as a way of reminding us that we are not self-sufficient and that we must depend on God for physical and spiritual provision
- God's Justice is both a promise of his justice, and an exhortation for us to learn justice from him and do similarly unto others
- Mercy, Goodness and Graciousness are relational in that He shows those attributes to us and expects us to emulate him when we relate to our fellow man.

It may be difficult to see why Eternity and Omnipresence are relational. It is because, in both their cases they have to do with mortals being in God's presence.

We are used to talking about our relationship with God because we perceive our need for that relationship. However, it would be well for us to consider it from God's point of view as well. We have said that God is self-sufficient, so why did He create man, and why does He care so much if his creation sins? I have heard it said that He created man so that He could have fellowship with man, and my prior response has been: "Why would a God who is so high above us want fellowship with the likes of us?" In other words, I doubted that God's desire for fellowship was the reason.

I am now looking at it differently. After all, almost all the things we know about God are his relational qualities and, other than the angels that we know very little about, God's entire outlet for relational fellowship was within his own Tri-unity—that is, within himself. Of course, I am limited in my understanding, but it would seem right that a God whose very being is relational would desire relationships, even with profoundly lesser beings such as we. So, let us build a case for it by pretending we are at the time just prior to creation.

God previously created angels for purposes other than for relationship so, in that way (among others), they were not created in God's image. Now God is wherever God is—let us say everywhere—but there is as yet no creation such as we know it, and God who is bursting with the qualities of love, grace, compassion, and goodness, has no outlet for it—no way to express it except by creating beings who mirror those qualities. So, He creates man in his image—not physically in his image, but in his image by possessing his attributes—especially his capacity to love. God began by creating one man, but that was not enough because man needed peer companionship in the same way that God had peer companionship within himself—among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, God created woman, and gave man the capacity to reproduce in order to expand his opportunities for relationship.

But the man Adam damaged his relationship with God by disobeying him. Adam wanted to be more like God than God granted him; he wanted to know about evil which is the opposite of good. It was not a loving act toward God, and God was deeply disappointed with Adam and we know about what happened as a result. People sometimes ask whether God made a mistake by allowing Adam to have the free will choice to either obey God or disobey him. After all, God could have created Adam without such a choice so that Adam would have been incapable of disobeying God. But really, God could not have if He wanted to have a true relationship with man, because relationship requires voluntariness. The removal of choice diminishes the quality of any relationship. So, God did not

make a mistake; he set things up in a way that exposed him to the possibility of disappointment, and He was, in fact, disappointed.

God had several options, but He was already relating to his creation, and He had compassion on Adam and mankind. Instead of destroying the world and starting over, God brought to bear another of his attributes—justice—to allow man an honorable and just way back to having fellowship with him. Eventually, the population of men grew, each in God’s image, so that each man had (and still has) the choice of keeping faith with God (which means firming up the relationship or sinning against him (which means doing things that violate the relationship)). We can violate our relationship with God by sinning against him directly, or indirectly by harming our fellow man and not using our godly attributes to bless.

So, this is why the *Sh’ma* in Scripture is so central. It is because loving God and loving man are the big umbrella of our relationship with God, and that relationship is the only reason we are alive. The reality of this relationship answers a question with which I have wrestled for some time. If God wants something done or something to happen, why doesn’t He just do it instead of insisting that we pray for it? We are told that we must pray according to God’s will and not according to our own. Why is this? Well, I think that understanding the primacy of our relationship with God is the answer. God is less interested in the outcome of a given situation than in fostering unity between him and us.

As mighty as God is, we hurt him every time we breach our relationship with him by committing sin; He has given us that liberty, and time to get ourselves to the place where we will choose him over other gods, and over ourselves. And by the way, the reason that Yeshua’s sacrifice for us on the cross was so awful for God is that for the first time, albeit momentarily, God broke relationship with himself. Our part is to honor God’s sacrifice by not continuing to hurt him, so let us conclude with a few Scriptures that will embed our relationship with God in our minds:

Matthew 22:37-40 *“Yeshua said to him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

John 13:34-35 *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Romans 13:8-10 *“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”*

Luke 4:16-21 *“So He [Yeshua] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was*

*handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Genesis 5:24 says: “*And Enoch walked with God.*” That is what having a true relationship with God is all about.

—NKJ

## The Gospel of John

*Delivered May 2, 2009*

There are two prominent Johns in the Bible—John the Immerser, and John the disciple. Either of the Johns is worthy of study, but John the disciple is the one I have in mind and the one I will speak to you about today.

John authored a book of the Bible that we call “The Gospel According to John...” he wrote other things also, but it is the Gospel book I will be speaking of. Of the four Gospels in the New Covenant Scriptures, John’s is unique in its disclosure of incidents in Yeshua’s life that are not mentioned in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Those books are sometimes referred to as the “synoptic” gospels in order to emphasize things that they have in common but that are different in the Book of John. For example, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Yeshua’s life is portrayed mainly from an historical perspective from his birth to his death. John’s account, by comparison, begins before the creation, and his various disclosures are on an elevated spiritual and prophetic plane:

*John 1:1-5: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”*

*John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

*John 1:16-17: “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Yeshua the Messiah.”*

We might ask why John says that the law was given through Moses, but that grace and truth came through Yeshua. Many people are baffled when they read the statement, and some wrongly derive from it that Yeshua’s grace replaced the Mosaic Law. They do that because they were taught that Moses came before Yeshua and they therefore automatically assume that the Mosaic Law came before Yeshua’s grace. But according to John, that is not so. Yeshua came first as “the Word...” in fact, he was there “in the beginning.” So, you see that Yeshua’s grace and truth came first and after that came the Mosaic Law. Grace and truth were always there.

Throughout John’s gospel book, John identifies Yeshua as being both deity and the son of God, and he also teaches the unity of the Father and the Son. In the end, John leaves them as mysteries, but his writing goes further than the other gospels in seeking to explain them.

Let us look a little further in John’s gospel. Chapter 2, verses 13-16 tell us:

*“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Yeshua went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the*

*oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"*

Yeshua was very principled. We will no doubt deal with principles other than those illustrated by Yeshua and we will not be turning over money tables, but principled we are destined to be, and our life will be marked by the principles for which we stand and which we teach to others.

One of the most prevalent themes of the Gospel according to John is salvation. In John 3:6-8, Yeshua is recorded as teaching Nicodemus:

*"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

And in verses 16 and 17, we read the familiar salvation passage:

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

That is a positive message, but the fuller quote from verses 14 to verse 18 tells us the consequence of our not believing:

*"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*

According to John, Yeshua was not a respecter of persons and was not adverse to revealing himself to those who were unpopular among his fellow Jews but whose hearts were open. So, we read in John 4:6-14:

*"Now Jacob's well was there. Yeshua therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Yeshua said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Yeshua answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" Yeshua answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will*

*thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”*”

Here are some other important verses from the Book of John that we should know:

John 3:35-36: *“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. <sup>36</sup> “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”*

John 6:35-40: *“And Yeshua said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.””*

John 8:12: *“Then Yeshua spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.””*

John 8:58: *“Yeshua said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.””*

John 10:11: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”*

John 11:25-27: *“Yeshua said to her” (Martha that is), “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.””*

At Yeshua’s final Passover *seder* with his disciples, after Judas departed to betray him, Yeshua spoke intimately to his remaining disciples and taught them many things pertaining to the future. John records his following words in chapter 13, verses 33-35:

*“Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

It is interesting that Yeshua says to his disciples that loving one another as he loved them is a new commandment. It seems like it is not new because Leviticus 19:18 says that we are to love our neighbor as our self. So, apparently there is something different about Yeshua’s disciples loving one another as he loved them. I think the answer to this lies in another Scripture:

John 15:12-13: *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*

Loving one another is not new, but the degree to which Yeshua loved his disciples appears to be a new and higher standard of love—not only as we love ourselves, but a love for others even unto sacrificing ourselves for them. In fact, the context of Yeshua declaring his love as a new commandment was immediately after he predicted his death that was soon to come. Anyway, the disciples were perplexed by Yeshua saying he was going away, and he responded in chapter 14, verses 1-4:

*“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”*

Yeshua is telling his disciples that they already know where he is going and the way to get there, yet Thomas does not grasp it and so he asks Yeshua how they can know the way (verse 5). It is then that Yeshua declares the extraordinary verses 6 and 7 of chapter 14:

*“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”*

Philip is still mystified, because he says to Yeshua in verse 8:

*“Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”*

So Yeshua responds to him in verses 9-11:

*“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”*

John quotes Yeshua’s teachings to his disciples extensively from chapter 13 to chapter 17. I cannot address it all here, but I want to touch on one thing of great importance, and that is Yeshua saying that though he must go away, he will return and, meanwhile, he will send the Holy Spirit to comfort:

John 16:7-16: *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will*

*take of Mine and declare it to you. A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”*

The Book of John is often the first Bible book that is recommended for a seeker to read, and there is a good reason for it. The reason is that, of all the books of the Bible, it is the most complete in declaring Yeshua’s bottom line for salvation and for a normal blessed life with God. That is not to take away from the importance of the other books of the Bible, but if we properly understand and follow what is in the Book of John, we are assured of being on the right path.

—NKJ



## **Jewish Understanding of Yeshua's Resurrection**

*Delivered April 1, 2018*

There are different Jewish understandings of Yeshua's resurrection because there are different Jewish understandings of who Yeshua is. From the First Century until today there has always been a split within the Jewish community as to whether Yeshua is or is not the long-awaited Messiah. We who call ourselves Messianic Jews believe that Yeshua is the son of God, the person of God who allowed himself to be born on earth as a man in order to make disciples and to sacrifice himself that we might be cleansed of our sins and have eternal life with him. According to Scripture, Yeshua died and rose on the third day, fully prepared to return to his Father in heaven; this is what we refer to as his resurrection that we are remembering and celebrating today. But he did not ascend to heaven until a full forty days had passed. During that time, he appeared to his disciples in his resurrected form, taught them and, before ascending to his Father, told them to wait in Jerusalem for a counselor that he would send them whom we now know to be the Holy Spirit.

So that is the Messianic Jewish understanding of Yeshua's resurrection, but you know all that and I was asked to speak about the wider Jewish understanding of Yeshua's resurrection, which I will now attempt to do from an historical and Jewish theological perspective.

The possibility of Yeshua's resurrection in the First Century was not controversial because resurrection of the dead had been a core doctrine of traditional Jewish understanding for centuries. By the time of Moses, the prevailing Jewish belief was that all Jews who obeyed God's commandments would be resurrected—not only the Messiah. So, why (you may ask) was Yeshua's disciple Thomas so incredulous when he was told about Yeshua's resurrection after being buried? I will read you the passage in [John 20:24-28](#) that speaks about it:

*“Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Yeshua came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Yeshua came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!””*

Thomas believed in resurrection of the dead as did most Jews of his day (the Sadducees did not, by the way), so why did he disbelieve it when he was told of Yeshua's resurrection? The difficulty for Thomas was that Yeshua could be resurrected—not in the end of days as was the Jewish understanding—but so soon after his death and then, on top of that, walk on the earth as though a natural man. This was indeed different than the Jewish understanding which was that a person is resurrected and goes to heaven (or elsewhere) at the end of days—not where he dies and shortly thereafter walks into your room with his body intact. Thomas should not have been surprised however, because he knew of how Yeshua raised Lazarus from the dead just a while back; we read about it in [John 11:19-24](#):

*“And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Yeshua was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Then Martha said to Yeshua, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You. Yeshua said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.””*

You see, right there Martha was stating the Jewish understanding of resurrection, which is that all of Israel who are in their graves will be resurrected at the last day—notice that she said “at the last day”—not yesterday, today, or tomorrow. Her typical Jewish understanding was derived from Daniel 12:1-2 which reads:

*“At that time Michael [presumably the archangel] shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*

This same concept was spoken by Yeshua in John 5:26-29, where he is recorded as having said:

*“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”*

There was, however, a difference between what Daniel said and what Yeshua said. Daniel spoke only of Israel's resurrection because the New Covenant had not yet come. But, when Yeshua spoke, he was letting those who heard him know that resurrection to eternal life was for everyone who belonged to him—Jew and non-Jew alike. But let us return to read John 11:25-27 and the resurrection of Lazarus:

*“Yeshua said to her [i.e. Martha] “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.””*

And jumping down to John 11:38-44 we read:

*“Then Yeshua, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Yeshua said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” Yeshua said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Yeshua lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but*

*because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Yeshua said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.””*

Well, that is the Jewish background and understanding of resurrection and, by extension, Yeshua's resurrection. Admittedly, the example of Lazarus is not typical because he was resurrected to mortal life and would one day be resurrected again. The good news for us is that we who have received Yeshua as our Lord and Savior have been pre-judged and guaranteed eternal life. Yeshua's resurrection (that we celebrate today) was unique in that he was the first man to be resurrected, not to mortal life, but to eternal life (remember that he referred to himself as the “son of man”). And many were witnesses to his being taken up into heaven, for we read in [Acts 1:6-11](#):

*“Therefore, when they [i.e. the disciples] had come together; they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Yeshua, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.””*

So, my brothers and sisters, our celebration today of Yeshua's resurrection should also be a celebration of our own resurrection to come, for we read in [1 Thessalonians 4:14-17](#):

*“For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Yeshua. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*

Because of Yeshua's sacrificial death and resurrection, we can look forward to our own resurrection one day, and to live with our Lord and savior forever.

—NKJ

## The Meaning of *Bar Mitzvah*

Delivered November 3, 2007

The word “*Bar*” (as in “*Bar Mitzvah*”) is an Aramaic word that means “son,” and *Mitzvah* is the Aramaic and Hebrew word for “Commandment.” So, *Bar Mitzvah* means “Son of Commandment.” Notice that there is no article “the” in *Bar Mitzvah*, so the term does not mean “Son of THE Commandment”—it means “Son of Commandment.” All of them! And a “Son of Commandment,” although young in age, is responsible as an adult for keeping all of God’s commandments as appropriate, and as adapted to the New Covenant. And not only for keeping them, but also for teaching them to others and especially to his future children, for as the “*Sh’ma*” states:

*Deuteronomy 6:5-9: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

That includes the part of the *Sh’ma* that Yeshua quoted when he was asked which is the great commandment in the law ([Matthew 22:36](#)), and he added another—that to love our neighbor as our self is like it, and that on those two commandments hang the entire *Torah* and the Prophets.

Now that is a profound statement that should speak to every *Bar Mitzvah*. It is a statement that links God’s commandments to loving God and loving our fellow man. It is a statement that tells us that doing what a commandment says to do is not good enough. It tells us that our motives count, and that whatever actions we take in response to God’s Law must be based on love.

I have never heard God described as a flower child,<sup>19</sup> but perhaps there are elements of truth in it that we should not be so quick to dismiss. After all, [1 John 4:7-8](#) instructs us:

*“...let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*

Some would ask: “How can we come to love God whom we cannot see, cannot touch, who is all powerful, and who holds our life and death in his hands?” The answer is given in [1 John 4:19](#):

*“We love Him because He first loved us.”*

So, the very first commandment of Jewish Law with which a *Bar Mitzvah*, a Son of Commandment, must come to terms, is loving God with all his heart, soul and strength. But related to it is God’s other commandment that we must love one another, because Scripture teaches in [1 John 4:12](#):

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<sup>19</sup> Synonym for “hippie,” circa 1967.

*“If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”*

And God is very practical in telling us what loving our fellow man has to consist of;

1 John 3:17 states:

*“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”*

Here God is talking about the *mitzvah* called *tzedakah* or compassionate charitable giving. And, as the Good Book also says (Reb Tevye<sup>20</sup> calls the Bible “The Good Book”):

James 2:15-17: *“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*

Finally, Scripture puts it in a way that no one can misunderstand:

1 John 4:20-21: *“If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”*

But I thought we started out talking about *Bar Mitzvah*. Well, we did, and we still are, because the first thing a *Bar Mitzvah* must do to keep God’s commandments is to love God, and to love his brother human beings.

Let us move on. If we go a little further in the *Sh’ma*, we are told to:

*“...talk of them [meaning God’s commandments] when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

Let us take a closer look at these commandments in order to see what God expects of us. First, verse 7:

*“...and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house”*

We usually do not live alone in our house. Those of us who are young live with our mother and father and, although we are accustomed to them teaching us God’s Word, there will be times when they will need to hear God’s Word spoken by us to them as well. What I am suggesting is that, as of the day of *Bar Mitzvah*, God wants us to begin giving back to our parents the blessing of the counsel of God that they have been pouring into us since our birth. Yes, most *B’nei Mitzvah* are young and

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<sup>20</sup> “Fiddler on the Roof,” adapted from Sholem Aleichem’s *Tevye the Dairyman*, 1894-1914.

not as knowledgeable or experienced as their parents, but through the *Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit), God can speak wisdom, encouragement, and comfort through us to them as well when they need it.

And verse 7 goes on to say:

*“You shall talk of them (meaning God’s commandments) ‘when you walk by the way.’”*

In other words, when we leave our house, godliness should follow us and the people we encounter—our friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. When they hear us speak, they should hear God’s *Torah* come forth from our mouth, and they should experience God’s love through us. That is our responsibility to others as a Jew, because we have a covenant responsibility to be a light to the people of the world who either do not know God at all, or who have an incomplete knowledge of him and need to know him better. To fulfill such a high calling, we are commanded concerning how we are to speak thusly:

Ephesians 4:29: *“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers...”*

Moving along, verse 7 of the *Sh’ma* continues:

*“You shall talk of them ‘when you lie down, and when you rise up.’”*

So, God’s words should not only be spoken when we are outside of our house going about our daily business, but they should be the last things we speak before we retire for the night, and the first things we utter when we wake in the morning. Between that and what we said previously, it is clear that God wants his Words to be on our lips all day long.

And verse 8 of the *sh’ma* goes on to say:

*“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”*

Orthodox Judaism interprets these words literally, so a small parchment scroll containing a portion of Deuteronomy is placed in black boxes called *t’fillin*, that are tied to the arm and the forehead during morning prayer. We can do that or not as we wish, but what is vital is that we understand its purpose—to remind us that whatever we put our hands to, and whatever we put our minds to, they must reflect God’s holiness. Putting it another way: We are always to direct our minds and actions toward things that are godly:

Philippians 4:8: *“...brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”*

Finally, verse 9 of the *Sh’ma* commands us:

*“You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

Again, Orthodox Judaism interprets the words literally, so the tradition developed of putting a portion of Scripture into a protective box called a *mezuzah*. The *mezuzah* is then tacked to the outside doors and gates of our houses in order to remind us of God’s Word whenever we enter and whenever we leave.

So, is that it? Everything a *Bar Mitzvah* needs to know? Not nearly. There are numerous commandments recorded in the *Torah* that defy anyone living today to keep literally. Things like sacrificing a goat in the Tabernacle on *Yom Kippur* when there is no Tabernacle or Temple. Things like asking a priest to diagnose our skin lesion when there is no functioning Levitical Priesthood. During the time of Moses, when such commandments were given, they could all be performed literally because God provided the infrastructure to be able to do them. But what is a *Bar Mitzvah*, a “Son of Commandment” to do about such commandments today? The answer lies in two Scriptures—one from the Book of Jeremiah and the other from the Kitvey B’rit Chadashah (New Covenant Writings); first Jeremiah 31:31(32)-33(34):

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My Torah in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

Jeremiah prophesied a time in the future (which is today) when God would make a New covenant with the Jewish people whereby we could be so intimate with God, that the commandments of *Torah* would reside within us and we would not have to look outside of our hearts and minds to know God’s will. The second Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, tells us:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

So, everything the *Bar Mitzvah* needs to know to serve God can be found in Scripture, and all Scripture is profitable for all the things that were listed. That means that even those commandments which are archaic and today cannot be complied with literally are usable if we know how to interpret and adapt them. And what is the key to knowing how to adapt God’s law? According to Jeremiah, it is God himself who visits us personally and places his *Torah* in our hearts and minds, and Ezekiel 36:26-27 further explains that this is accomplished through God giving us a new heart and a new spirit, and then putting his own Spirit, the *Ruach Kodesh*, within us:

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”*

Most of Judaism still waits for a *mashiach* who will send God’s Spirit to do what Ezekiel prophesied, but we who are Messianic Jews know that the *mashiach* has already come, that he is Yeshua, and that through him we enjoy an intimacy with God that only the *Ruach HaKodesh* can provide.

—NKJ



## Soteriology and Wider Hope

*Delivered March 22, 2008*

I just returned from a UMJC symposium that was titled *Thinking Together About Soteriology*. Soteriology is the study of the Bible's position on who is saved, through what criteria, and through what process. On first impression, the issue of salvation may seem elementary. For example, the well-known Scripture of [John 3:16](#):

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

Okay, but according to [James 2:19](#), “*even the demons believe and tremble,*” so [John 3:16](#) is not without a need for interpretation, and even Billy Graham once said of that verse and the devil:

*“Intellectually, he believes in the dogma. He believes in the creeds. But the devil has never been saved, and he is not going to heaven. You may be able to recite theology, but I tell you that is not enough.”*

Of course, the devil believes in God—he once lived with him. Remember that according to [John 1:1-3](#), Yeshua was there from the beginning, and through him all things were made. So, the devil once lived with Yeshua and he knows him well. For the devil, it is not faith—it is absolute knowledge that Yeshua is the son of God.

So, the formula for salvation is not as simple and straightforward as some would have us believe because it has to do with the condition of the heart, and no one but God can read hearts. And as you begin to consider this subject, the mysteries and questions surrounding salvation grow and grow. For example, are we saved if we believe in our heart but never confess our belief to another person? Are we saved if we believe in our heart but are never immersed for our faith? What if today we believe and confess, but tomorrow we deny God? And one more (although there are many other such questions)—if we are immersed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but the one who immersed us neglected to say “in the name of Yeshua,” was the immersion defective and therefore insufficient for our salvation? There are some people who would answer “yes” and others who would answer “no” to each one of those questions.

To many of us, these rhetorical questions are familiar because we have encountered them early in our Bible learning. And if we were to poll each other on our beliefs about such things, we would find differences because we have all been indoctrinated by the individuals and the institutions that first taught us, for whom there always seemed to be a precise answer and only one right way of looking at everything. And so long as we remained at our original congregational homes, we very likely encountered only those who believed as we did. But we did not remain there, for look around us; we are here—not there. And in the process of coming here, we brought with us many deeply held convictions and presuppositions and we may find it disturbing that the persons to our left and right do not necessarily share our views. All I can say to that is “smile, you’re now part of Messianic Judaism.”

The Soteriology Conference I attended did not attempt to address all aspects of salvation; rather it focused on a recent hot-topic in both Evangelicalism and Messianic Judaism over whether or to what extent there is biblical latitude for an individual's eternal life with God other than what is most commonly taught in evangelical and fundamentalist circles—that to be saved, a person must, during his lifetime, confess the historic Yeshua as Lord and savior, and be baptized. This latitude, should it exist, is what theologians call “Wider Hope.”

David Rudolph, the chairman of the UMJC's Theology Committee organized and moderated the meeting. And a good moderator he was, the proof being that everyone left the meeting as friends. There were five papers presented, and a total of twenty of us attended and were able to pepper the presenters with questions.

Now let me explain why this foundational subject has risen to such a high profile in the Messianic Jewish movement and in the UMJC in particular. It is because the differences of opinion held on the matter have threatened the unity Jewish believers in Yeshua to the extent that some congregations have actually withdrawn from the Union with Jewish leaders accusing each other of heresy. I could have quietly attended the Soteriology Conference and not given this message today, but I do not think putting our heads in the sand is what God wants us to do.

There is a reason why the classical evangelical view of salvation raises hackles in Messianic Jewish ministry. It is because most outreach techniques that have come out of evangelicalism have proven not to work in drawing Jews to Yeshua. The evangelical approach of offering the choice of eternal life or a Hell-fire death assumes things that are typically not true of Jews. It assumes (for example) that the hearer is motivated by the prospect of having eternal life or by the fear of annihilation; among Jews, this is usually not the case. Gentile children who are brought to Christian churches by their parents are often exposed to years of hearing salvation messages of fire and brimstone preached from the pulpit. In some cases it is a turnoff, yet it instills in the young person a value for salvation that can surface later in life in response to an evangelistic message. Jewish children who attend synagogue and Hebrew School, however, hardly ever encounter the subject of eternal life and, if they do, it is a side issue that is given only fleeting attention. As for secular Jews, their unbelief in God and the Scriptures precludes their giving any credibility to the possibility of eternal life, so they are fully accepting of not having it. The consequence of this is that offering a Jew salvation if he will come to Yeshua generally does not produce a positive response. Of course, if the Holy Spirit is at work, you can offer the Jewish person “Post Toasties” and he will respond.

The disciples were sent out to the entire world and, in [Mark 16:15-16](#), we read that Yeshua said to them:

*“Go into all the world and preach the gospel (meaning the Good News) to every creature. He who believes and is immersed will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

That's pretty plain, but to a Jew, the Good News is often viewed as bad news because if you put it exactly in the way of the Mark Scripture, you are telling him that his entire family who passed on before him, possibly including his saintly mother, are now burning in Hell! What kind of good news is that?

On the other hand, in Matthew 28:19-20, in a different formulation of the “Great Commission,” we read:

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”*

This approach is received more positively by Jewish people because it does not seek to entice through a carrot of salvation and does not threaten anyone if the Gospel is rejected. Furthermore, it is an approach that is familiar in Judaism because *mikveh* immersion is a familiar Jewish custom, and teaching to observe things that are commanded is a *Torah*-faithful approach to God that is completely familiar and completely Jewish. Of course, one must get the point across that obeying Yeshua’s commandments and relying on his sacrifice is part of what it means to be *Torah*-faithful.

Okay, back to the Soteriology Symposium. You recall I said that the conference focused on whether or to what extent there is biblical latitude for an individual to have eternal life without his having made a conscious commitment to the historic Yeshua during his lifetime. All the participants at the conference believed that everyone who has eternal life has received it through the sacrifice and resurrection of Yeshua. As for terminology, those who believed that God allows no latitude whatever in what our response to Yeshua must be in order for us to have eternal life were said to ascribe to a “narrow hope.” Those who believed that there is little latitude but that God, in his mercy allows some exceptions, were said to ascribe to a “narrow wider hope,” and those who believed that God allows considerable latitude to those who have not sufficiently heard the Gospel message were said to ascribe to a “wider hope.” At the extreme end, were at least two participants who would probably say that if one comes to know God intimately, loves him as the *Sh'ma* commands and leads a *Torah*-faithful and repentant life, that person has de facto received the Messiah and may be saved even if he does not admit that the one in whom he believes is Yeshua. That view was termed a “wide wider hope.”

Now it should not surprise us that if there is something out there to believe, someone in the world believes it. So the question for all of us should be “What does Scripture say on the subject of salvation?” because, in ministering Yeshua to Jewish people, answers will be demanded of us and if we are unknowledgeable in how we answer we will discredit both ourselves and God. In my opinion, of all the views, the narrow hope and the narrow wider hope are the two that are most biblically defensible and, of the two, the narrow wider hope is the one I prefer and that our *Shaliach* Dan Juster prefers. Of the classical theologians, Francis Schaffer would argue for a narrow hope on the basis of his belief that all of humanity deserves spiritual death and eternal separation from God, so any criteria that God establishes for salvation is both fair and gracious, even if some people have little or no opportunity to avail themselves of it. John Wesley, on the other hand, would argue for a narrow wider hope on the basis that Scripture is silent on some situations for which God, in his justice and mercy, must have a plan. These include children who die before reaching an age of understanding, adults who are mentally impaired, and persons who live in isolated parts of the world where the Gospel has never been taught. Wesley’s view is more intricate than that, but what I have just said is enough for now.

While both the narrow hope view and the narrow wider hope view are defensible in Scripture, as a way of explaining why the narrow wider hope view is more practical in Jewish ministry, I would like to read a short section from Dan Juster's paper that he presented at the meeting. Here is what he said:

*“The narrow hope view provides us with difficulties. It too easily thinks that we can judge who is and who is not “saved” on an individual basis. It involves a judgment of the unseen heart. It does not give adequate to those Scriptures that more than hint at a wider mercy from God for those that seek the Truth. I see no gain in holding this position over against the narrow wider hope view. For one thing, it makes us so narrow that others will unnecessarily dismiss us as bigots. When Billy Graham was on Larry King's show and was asked concerning the destiny of those who have not accepted Yeshua, he made two statements. One was that Yeshua was the way and that he was called to proclaim salvation through believing in him which is the way of assurance of salvation. He made it clear that there was a great danger of being lost. However, he also said that the destiny of those who have not had opportunity to receive Him was a mystery and that God was the Judge, not Billy Graham. He trusted that God was merciful and would save all that He could. He held out hope for God's mercy. This seemed to satisfy Larry. At least, Billy Graham did not look like a narrow minded bigot.”*

*“About a year previous, one of the leaders of a major Jewish outreach organization was also on Larry King's show with a noted Rabbi. The Rabbi accused the leader of having an abhorrent and narrow view that all those who have not explicitly embraced Yeshua were going to Hell. He stated that the leader believed that the victims of the Holocaust went from the ovens of Aushwitz to the eternal barbeque in Hell. This was an emotional appeal that was not totally valid. However, it had its effect. The missions leader had nothing to say and responded as if this was his view. Yeshua was presented as the only way, and this meant explicit confession in this life in every case. Instead, he could have asserted that Yeshua was the way to salvation for Jew and Gentile, and the way to assurance for one's eternal destiny. At the same time he could have said that God would mercifully judge all who sought the truth and to live according to righteousness in dependence on His grace. This is the basic teaching of the Judaism of the Siddur.”*

I had reached the same conclusions about salvation some time ago but had not been able to express it with Dr. Juster's eloquence. For a long time now, I have refused to refer to any individual as “saved” or “unsaved.” The concepts are biblical, but I cannot read hearts as God can, and the authority to judge is not mine. 1 Corinthians 3:7 says that love believes all things. So, when a person verbalizes either his faith or lack of faith in Yeshua, I believe him unless his actions say otherwise. If he professes faith, I relate to him as a brother in the faith, and if he professes no faith, I relate to him as someone who needs to hear the Gospel. But these are working assumptions—not judgments.

There are four categories of Scripture that lead me to my understanding of what is needed in order to have eternal life. The first category is illustrated by 1 John 5:11-12:

*“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

This tells me that eternal life is in Yeshua. If we have Yeshua we have eternal life and, if we do not have him, we do not have eternal life. The Scripture does not, however, explain what having Yeshua means or how we acquire him.

The second category of Scripture states that there is a day of judgment when God will judge all men. It is illustrated by Hebrews 6:1-2 and 9:27, 1 Peter 4:5, 2 Peter 2:9, and Revelation 20:11-15. These Scriptures tell me that God is our judge; therefore, I must do nothing to preempt his judgment. In assessing a person's need, I note what he appears to have and what he appears to lack. If he needs to know about Yeshua and will listen to me, I will tell him whatever he needs to know. If he appears to have adequate and correct information about Yeshua but does not profess faith, I will attempt to minister faith to him. If he appears to know Yeshua and expresses faith but needs to be discipled, I will help him as the Lord gives me wisdom and resources to do so. Therefore, whether he is saved or unsaved never becomes an issue in my ministry. I consider that it is my job to assess where a person is in his walk with the Lord and help him to get one step closer to where he ought to be.

The third category of Scripture reveals that by God's grace and mercy (1) water immersion, (2) calling on the Name, (3) confessing Yeshua's lordship with one's mouth, (4) believing in him in one's heart, (5) following him, and (6) having faith in him, together enable a person to enjoy God's salvation and have eternal life. The Scriptures that illustrate these are many, but here are a few: Matthew 19:16, Mark 16:16, Luke 7:50, John 3:16, Acts 2:21 and 16:30-31, Romans 10:1, 9, and 13, Ephesians 2:5 and 8, and Titus 3:5. These Scriptures (and others that are similar) tell me that faith in Yeshua, accompanied by corroborating deeds, results in salvation and eternal life. From the diversity of the corroborating deeds found in the Scriptures (e.g. confessing him with our mouth, becoming immersed, etc.), I conclude that it is our faith and not any particular deed that gives us our salvation. That notwithstanding, the Book of James also teaches that "Faith without works is dead," which suggests that if our faith does not motivate us to action, it is not faith at all. While these Scriptures indicate that faith in Yeshua results in eternal life, they do not address what happens in cases where faith is absent or where there is faith in God but no recognition of Yeshua.

Now category 4:

Luke 13:23-24: *"Then one said to Him, 'Lord, are there few who are saved?' And He said to them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.'"*

John 10:9: *"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."*

John 14:6: *"Yeshua said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"*

Acts 4:12: *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

These Scriptures tell me what a person must do in order to be certain of having eternal life. The Luke Scripture exhorts us to strive to enter the narrow gate which I understand to be declaring faith in Yeshua. One can read this Scripture to infer that there may be a wider gate also, but no detail is given about it, and we receive no encouragement to seek it. The John Scriptures state that Yeshua is the door to salvation and the only way to the Father; they promise that anyone who enters the door (i.e. declares faith in Yeshua) will be saved. The Acts Scripture states that there is only one name—Yeshua’s name—through which salvation is a certainty. This is a commitment by God that if we call upon Yeshua for salvation (i.e. declare faith in Yeshua), we will have it.

My conclusion from these four categories of Scriptures is that there is only one certain way to have eternal life, and that is through faith in Yeshua as evidenced by our willingness to call him by name, confess him publicly, submit to water immersion, and follow him in a *Torah*-oriented life that is led by the Holy Spirit. I also conclude that anyone who has eternal life has received it through Yeshua, but I cannot conclude from the Scriptures that anything short of a conscious and deliberate acceptance of the historic Yeshua precludes God from granting a person eternal life in exceptional situations; on the other hand, I see no authorization for me to speculate about such exceptions or hold out the possibility to a seeker so I do not.

My approach to salvation ministry is to ask a seeker if he wants to be sure of having eternal life—life after death, forever with God. If his answer is “yes,” I tell him he must confess that Yeshua of Nazareth is Messiah and Lord, receive him as Lord, and accept his sacrifice to atone for the seeker’s sins. If he struggles against accepting Yeshua and asks if there is some other way, my response is that confessing Yeshua in faith is the only authorized way and the only sure way. If he persists in seeking another way, I tell him that I am not authorized to help him in it, and I ask him if he is willing to gamble his eternal life on some other route. The rest, I tell him, is between him and God and, if he wants a simple way to look at it, I tell him to read the Scriptures to discover what God wants and then don’t say “no” to any of it; don’t try to negotiate.

—NKJ

## **Torah and the *Ru'ach***

*Delivered November 7, 2009*

Last week, we heard the testimony of a Messianic Jewish Rabbi on how, when he encountered the power of the Holy Spirit, it changed his life and his ministry. I previously told you of my similar post-conversion experience with the Spirit—how before the Holy Spirit came upon me my beliefs, while strong, lacked a dimension of the supernatural and God's power. I still have difficulty describing the difference because it was subtle at first, but what I can say for sure is that afterwards my relationship with God became more experiential and personal.

The rabbi and I have in common that we both appreciate our need, as Jews, to live *Torah*-observant lives and model it for others. Yet, when we were immersed in the Holy Spirit years after we first came to faith, it made a significant difference in both our lives. It should not surprise us though, because the *Torah* is replete with momentous interventions of the Holy Spirit. Here are some of them:

Genesis 1:1-3: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light."*

From this we see that God's Spirit was involved in the creation of the world.

Exodus 31:1-5: *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship."*

Here we see that God's Spirit was needed for understanding, knowledge, workmanship and wisdom to create artifacts to be used in worshipping God. It is intriguing to think that before Bezalel received the Holy Spirit, he may have had the two largest thumbs in all of Israel.

Numbers 11:16-17: *"So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone."*

Here we see another empowering by the Spirit—this time for wisdom to sit as a judge and relieve Moses. Notice that this time, God transferred some of the Spirit that was already upon Moses and distributed it among the seventy elders.

Now here is a Scripture that expands upon the occurrence just mentioned; it is interesting because the Holy Spirit sought out two individuals who were supposed to be at the Tabernacle along with others to receive him but, for some reason, they were not:

Numbers 11:25-30: *“Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again. But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, “Moses my lord, forbid them!” “Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” And Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel.”*

This next occurrence of the Spirit falling upon a man is amusing in that the man (an enemy of Israel) was made to praise Israel against his natural inclination:

Numbers 24:2-5: *“And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him. Then he took up his oracle and said: “The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened, the utterance of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, with eyes wide open: “How lovely are your tents, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!”*

I have heard it said that under the Mosaic Covenant the Holy Spirit came UPON certain people, but under the New Covenant he dwelt WITHIN people. Here is an example in the *Torah* that contradicts that, where God specifically informs Moses that Joshua has the Holy Spirit within him:

Numbers 27:18-19: *“And the LORD said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.”*

But I think the most impressive statement about the Holy Spirit is found in Psalms shortly after David’s sin was exposed. In Psalms 51:11(9) David pleads with God:

*“Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”*

You see here that David associates having the Holy Spirit with being in God’s presence, and that is really what I want to talk to you about today.

When we talk about living a Torah-observant Jewish life, we mean modern Jewish life—not First Century Jewish life. First Century Jewish life and Jewish life throughout the entire Mosaic Covenant period involved a full appreciation of the power of the Holy Spirit; it was a reality within the Jewish community during the entire time that the Temple stood, and the Levitical priesthood served. However, something profound happened to Judaism after 70 AD. The Second Temple was destroyed and Jewish focus on the presence of God and Holy Spirit Power went away with it. Judaism was thrown into a crisis, and influential rabbis of the time, in an attempt to save the Judaism that they knew, led the Jewish people into changing their beliefs of what was required to please God. Whereas



animal sacrifices in the Temple used to be the basis for atonement of sin, good works and keeping the commandments of *Torah* were now said to be acceptable substitutes and, although the Holy Spirit had already made himself available on the *Shavuot* following Yeshua's death, he was not received by the majority of the Jews of the day in the same way as Yeshua was not received. That is why the Judaism that resulted and that comes down to us today as Rabbinical Judaism relates to God in a way that is (for the most part) rule-keeping and not oriented to expecting and interacting with God's presence. In short, the Holy Spirit ceased to be on the radar screen of normative Jewish life and practice.

Enter now modern Messianic Judaism—a New Covenant Jewish rediscovery of Yeshua and the Holy Spirit. But our first encounter with New Covenant realities was not through Judaism; it was through a Christianity that did not understand the Jewish calling to *Torah*—a Christianity that saw *Torah* law as in opposition to the grace and salvation of Yeshua and also in opposition to what it termed “New Covenant liberty.” A Christianity that, over the millennia, did all it could to distance itself from Jewish practices of the *Torah*, even to the extent of ignoring the Bible's definition of the New Covenant which, according to [Jeremiah 31](#), is that the *Torah* would be written on Jewish hearts and imbedded in Jewish minds.

Now we Jews had a part to play in this also. In response to Christianity's rejection and persecution of us, we dug in against anything we perceived to be Christian, including Yeshua and the Holy Spirit. So, when God began removing the blindness to Yeshua from Jewish eyes and when, as a consequence, modern Jews in the twentieth century (myself included) discovered Yeshua, many of us thought that we had left Judaism to become Christians. When we realized that was not the case and became more settled in our Jewish identities, we did a 180 degree turn and tried to make ourselves look as Jewish as possible, modeling our practices after the contemporary synagogue that has little understanding of the Holy Spirit. We managed to fit Yeshua into our Jewish practices, but we either ignored the Holy Spirit or incorporated him in ways that were culturally Christian.

Scripture teaches that there is a time for everything, and I think we are seeing that the time for reestablishing the Holy Spirit in *Torah* life and Jewish practice has come. We witnessed this in the rabbi's teaching last week, in the outpouring of the Spirit at the Tikkun conference, in the UMJC's decision to conduct a seminar on “Welcoming the *Ruach HaKodesh* into Jewish Space,” and in Messianic Jews, known for their orthopraxy, turning their lives and ministries over to the Holy Spirit.

Friends, I hope you are convinced by what you have heard today and before today that Messianic Judaism is in the midst of an exciting realization that the Holy Spirit and *Torah*-observant life go hand in hand. It is something to put at the top of all our prayer lists.

—NKJ

## When Moses Heard, It He Was Satisfied

*Delivered September 14, 2013*

Leviticus 16 is the morning *Torah* reading for Yom Kippur. I would like to show you something God showed me that is within the Scripture, but that is often missed.

For background, let us first look at Leviticus 10:1-5:

*“But Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon, each took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and offered unauthorized fire before ADONAI, something he had not ordered them to do. At this, fire came forth from the presence of ADONAI and consumed them, so that they died in the presence of ADONAI. Moshe said to Aharon, “This is what ADONAI said: ‘Through those who are near me I will be consecrated, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” Aharon kept silent. Moshe called Misha’el and Eltzafan, sons of ‘Uzi’el Aharon’s uncle, and told them, ‘Come here, and carry your cousins away from in front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp.’ They approached and carried them in their tunics out of the camp, as Moshe had said.”*

A terrible thing has befallen Aaron. Two of his sons, *Nadav* and *Avihu*, priests by virtue of their lineage, sinned against God, and God executed them by fire. I hope that no one here has ever lost a child but, whether or not any of us have, we can all imagine the grief it must have caused Aaron as a parent. And the fact that his sons died because they sinned against God made it all the worse.

Now, from our *Torah* portion we read Leviticus 16:1-8:

*“ADONAI spoke with Moshe after the death of Aharon’s two sons, when they tried to sacrifice before ADONAI and died; ADONAI said to Moshe, “Tell your brother Aharon not to come at just any time into the Holy Place beyond the curtain, in front of the ark-cover which is on the ark, so that he will not die; because I appear in the cloud over the ark-cover. Here is how Aharon is to enter the Holy Place: with a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering. He is to put on the holy linen tunic, have the linen shorts next to his bare flesh, have the linen sash wrapped around him, and be wearing the linen turban—they are the holy garments. He is to bathe his body in water and put them on. He is to take from the community of the people of Isra’el two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. Aharon is to present the bull for the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and his household. He is to take the two goats and place them before ADONAI at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aharon is to cast lots for the two goats, one lot for ADONAI and the other for ‘Az’azel.”*

Aaron’s sons *Nadav* and *Avihu* have just died in humiliating dishonor, and God, who took their life, is giving Aaron detailed procedural instructions through Moses on how to conduct the *Yom Kippur* sacrifices, one of which is to offer a goat as a sin offering. If we look back at Leviticus 10:12-13, we see some of the same details:

*“Moshe said to Aharon and to El’azar and Itamar, his remaining sons, “Take the grain offering left from the offerings for ADONAI made by fire, and eat it without leaven next to the altar;*

*because it is especially holy. Eat it in a holy place, because it is your and your sons' share of the offerings for ADONAI made by fire; for this is what I have been ordered.*"

Then Moses, being the good administrator that he was, followed up with Aaron and discovered that El'azar and Itamar did not do what God had ordered. We read in Leviticus 10:16-18:

*"Then Moshe carefully investigated what had happened to the goat of the sin offering and discovered that it had been burned up. He became angry with El'azar and Itamar, the remaining sons of Aharon, and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the area of the sanctuary, since it is especially holy? He gave it to you to take away the guilt of the community, to make atonement for them before ADONAI. Look! Its blood wasn't brought into the sanctuary! You should have eaten it there in the sanctuary, as I ordered."*

Aaron answered for his sons, and said to Moses in Leviticus 10:19:

*"Even though they offered their sin offering and burnt offering today, things like these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have pleased ADONAI?"*

And then comes Moses' remarkable response in Leviticus 10:20:

*"On hearing this reply, Moshe was satisfied."*

Satisfied? How could Moses be satisfied when Aaron clearly did not follow God's instructions? And God's response was even more remarkable in that He did not respond at all! No fire from heaven! No destruction of Aaron and his two remaining sons! No punishment of Moses! Nothing! How can this be? God gave specific and detailed instructions for how to carry out the *Yom Kippur* sacrifice, Aaron and his sons did not do it, and when Moses heard Aaron's explanation he was satisfied! We have to assume that God was satisfied as well because he did not punish Aaron and his remaining sons and said nothing further about it!

I was perplexed by this, so I asked God to explain it to me, and I believe He did. A reality of our fallen world is that sometimes, obeying one *Torah* precept causes us to disobey another, and we have to make choices. Aaron and his remaining sons were in a state of mourning for their having just lost *Nadav* and *Avihu*, and their hearts were not, at that juncture, entirely right with the Lord. They knew that properly conducting the important *Yom Kippur* sin sacrifice was not just a mechanical act and that it required a certain heart attitude that they knew they did not have at that moment. It posed a dilemma for them that they resolved by allowing the sin offering to burn up rather than eating it, and apparently both Moses and God thought they made a correct decision. The reason I find this so intriguing is that I was taught that, in the Mosaic Covenant, literal obedience to the commandments of *Torah* was always required and that discernment was not available to the Israelites because the New Covenant and the Holy Spirit had not yet come. I should not have been surprised, however, since I knew that both Moses and Aaron had had conversations with God previously and communicating with God always involves the Holy Spirit.

I am calling this incident to your attention because it has helped me to understand and appreciate my ability and responsibility to discern through the Spirit today. I, like Aaron, *El'azar* and *Itamar*, am often faced with a dilemma of knowing how to apply some facet of the Mosaic *Torah* in this era when literal obedience to many of its commandments is either impossible or inappropriate. Such an example is Leviticus 23:27, which is related to *Yom Kippur*:

*“The tenth day of this seventh month is Yom-Kippur; you are to have a holy convocation, you are to deny yourselves, and you are to bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI.”*

We comply with God’s commandment today by having a holy convocation. We do not do ordinary work and we deny ourselves by fasting from food. But we do not bring an offering made by fire, which is part of the *Torah* instruction. Why not? We could construct a small wood-burning altar, but we are not doing it because the sacrifices and offerings commanded in the *Torah* were authorized in one place only—the Tabernacle and later the Holy Temple. If we tried to literally comply with Leviticus 23:27 today, the result would be disobedience rather than obedience. Logical? Yes, but our assurance that we are correct is not because of logic; it is because the Spirit of God has spoken to us and given us discernment.

Well, that example was fairly simple, but there are others that are not so obvious. So, let us pick another one—compliance with *Shabbat* commandments in general. First, we’ll review some of the Scriptures that apply:

Exodus 16:29-30: *“Look, ADONAI has given you the Shabbat. This is why he is providing bread for two days on the sixth day. Each of you, stay where you are; no one is to leave his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day.”*

Exodus 20:8-11: *“Remember the day, Shabbat, to set it apart for God. You have six days to labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat for ADONAI your God. On it, you are not to do any kind of work—not you, your son or your daughter, not your male or female slave, not your livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property. For in six days, ADONAI made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. This is why ADONAI blessed the day, Shabbat, and separated it for himself.”*

Exodus 31:14: *“Therefore you are to keep my Shabbat, because it is set apart for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it is to be cut off from his people.””*

Exodus 35:3: *“You are not to kindle a fire in any of your homes on Shabbat.”*

Deuteronomy 5:12-15: *“Observe the day of Shabbat, to set it apart as holy, as ADONAI your God ordered you to do. You have six days to labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat for ADONAI your God. On it you are not to do any kind of work—not you, your son or your daughter, not your male or female slave, not your ox, your donkey or any of your other livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property—so that your male and female servants can rest just as you do. You are to remember that you were a slave in*

*the land of Egypt, and ADONAI your God brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore ADONAI your God has ordered you to keep the day of Shabbat.”*

The one I am about to read, Isaiah 56:4-7, is particularly important because it specifically addresses Gentiles:

*“For here is what ADONAI says: ‘As for the eunuchs who keep my Shabbats, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant: in my house, within my walls, I will give them power and a name greater than sons and daughters; I will give him an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to ADONAI to serve him, to love the name of ADONAI, and to be his workers, all who keep Shabbat and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.’”*

Two more before we go on:

Mathew 12:7-12: *“A man there had a shriveled hand. Looking for a reason to accuse him of something, they asked him, ‘Is healing permitted on Shabbat?’ But he answered, ‘If you have a sheep that falls in a pit on Shabbat, which of you won’t take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore, what is permitted on Shabbat is to do good.’”*

Mark 2:27-28: *“Then he said to them, ‘Shabbat was made for mankind, not mankind for Shabbat; So the Son of Man is Lord even of Shabbat.’”*

Okay, those are the Scriptures we are seeking to apply, so now let us compare our own *Shabbat* decisions to what these Scriptures say:

- Do we rest on *Shabbat*? What constitutes rest for us?
- Do we “stay where we are” on *Shabbat*? What constitutes staying “where we are?”
- Do we set *Shabbat* apart for God? If our answer is “yes,” does that mean we never do anything ordinary on *Shabbat*?
- Do we cease from working on *Shabbat*? What kind of work is prohibited? Only the kind we ordinarily do? What about working on creative hobbies that give us pleasure? What about pulling the starter cord on a boat motor so we can go fishing? And what about fishing?
- Do we require adult children who live with us to also refrain from doing work? How about guests in our homes?
- Do we contemplate God’s creation and the exodus from Egypt on every *Shabbat*? Is it okay if we think about other things? Do our minds ever go to thinking about what has to be done when we return to work? Is that kind of thought sinful?

I know I am listing a lot of questions for just this one example of keeping the *Shabbat*, but it is an important example, so please permit me just a few more:

- Do we light our gas cooking stoves or fireplaces on *Shabbat*?
- Do we grill steaks in our backyards on *Shabbat*?
- Must we attend a holy convocation on *Shabbat*? Well, we're here today, but do we always have to attend a service?.
- Can we spend money on *Shabbat*? I cannot find a Scripture that prohibits it, so if our answer is "no," then why not? Don't some of us leave our tithes at the synagogue on *Shabbat*? Aren't we occasionally asked to give freewill offerings on *Shabbat*? Haven't some of us registered late at conferences and paid conference fees on *Shabbat*? Bought gasoline on *Shabbat*? Paid tolls getting to the conferences?.
- Do we benefit from other people's work on *Shabbat*? Like using our cell phones? Turning on radios or TVs? Relying upon police and fire personnel to protect us?.
- Do we actively look for ways to do good on *Shabbat*? Is it necessary to always do good deeds, or are good deeds merely permitted as a *Shabbat* exception?

And finally,

- If we are Gentiles rather than Jews, does that (or should that) make a difference?

These are enough questions to get us thinking. There is not a single step that we can take on *Shabbat* without being confronted by some of these questions and having to make decisions about them. And, the truth is that if we compare our answers, we will find that we have not all answered the questions in the same way because, in the main, we are relying on our abilities to discern in the Spirit, and God is speaking to each of us individually.

If we lived in an Orthodox Jewish community and ascribed to Orthodox Jewish life, our community would be making these kinds of decisions for us. However, the New Covenant does not contemplate that most decisions on applying the Mosaic *Torah* will be communal. We are given the Holy Spirit who facilitates our communication with God so that we can ask God directly, and God's answer is not necessarily the same for all of us.

Is this confusing? Perhaps, but it is also wonderful. God gave Israel written instructions (the *Torah*) at a certain time in its history that we still make use of today, but we need God's help in applying it to our different and diverse circumstances. And we get God's help in the same way as did Aaron and his sons—by listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit who speaks to us and leads us. If we are not led by God's voice, we will continually be making mistakes on how to interpret and apply *Torah*, so let us continue to embrace the Holy Spirit for our answers but realize that others who are doing the same thing may be hearing differently.

Today, *Yom Kippur*, is a day for reconciling relationships—our corporate relationship with God, and our individual relationships with God and with our fellow man. It is a day for reviewing the past year, asking the Spirit to show us how we have fallen short, and asking him how we can make things right. It is a day for considering how we have been keeping and applying the commandments of *Torah* and, in the example of Aaron and his sons, seeking the Holy Spirit for wisdom and direction when our available choices appear difficult. It is a day for asking the Holy Spirit to reveal our sins to us, convict us, and show us our way to repentance.

May God give us life and health in the coming year, with an even greater filling of the Holy Spirit.

—CJB





**E. Messianic Jewish Ministry**  
**Sermons • Vol 1**



## Approaches to Jewish Evangelism

*Delivered February 18, 2017*

Yeshua commanded his disciples in what has become known as the “Great Commission;” it is recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, which reads:

*“So the eleven talmidim went to the hill in the Galil where Yeshua had told them to go. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some hesitated. Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age.”*

“The Great Commission” is synonymous with “evangelism,” which is synonymous with “preaching the Good News of Messiah’s salvation message,” and it seems like ages since I have taught on it. So, I want to teach on it today by reviewing the most commonly employed evangelistic methods, and then exploring another method that, although solidly biblical, is hardly ever used. What is that method, you ask? I am going to keep you in suspense until I get to it.

There are nine ways that most of us have been taught to minister Yeshua to unbelievers. The first, is giving testimony of our own experience in coming to faith. This is powerfully persuasive, and the Holy Spirit has been known to fall on the unbeliever while the testimony is being shared.

The second method exposes the unbeliever to relevant Scriptures and seeks to answer his questions as to why the Scriptures are true, and the New Testament and Messiah Yeshua are Jewish. This method of evangelism is taught in some Messianic Jewish institutions of higher learning where it is known as “Jewish apologetics;” part of it is identifying Messianic prophecies in the *Tanakh*, and then demonstrating their fulfillment in the New Testament.

The third method invites the unbeliever to a Messianic Jewish worship service in the hope that the Jewish environment, the message preached, or something else will cause him to turn in his thinking and believe. That “something else” has to be the Holy Spirit who must be active in all of these methods for any of them to succeed.

The fourth method presents Jews for Jesus’s “Four Jewish Spiritual Laws.” They are “oldies but goodies”—usually ministered from a small booklet or tract, and are so well thought out, simple, and effective, that I want to spend just a few minutes describing them.

The first “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: **“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”** The Scripture used to support it is Jeremiah 31:2(3), which states:

*“From a distance ADONAI appeared to me, [saying,] “I love you with an everlasting love; this is why in my grace I draw you to me.”*

And also, Psalm 16:11:

*“You make me know the path of life; in your presence is unbounded joy, in your right hand eternal delight.”*

It is important to point out to those to whom we minister that *Tanakh* verse numbers in Jewish Bibles are not always the same as those in Christian Bibles; Jeremiah 31:2(3) quoted above is such an example.

The second “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: **“Man is sinful and separated from God, and thus he cannot know and experience God’s Love and Plan for his life.”** Explained another way: **“Man is continually trying to have an abundant life through his own efforts—good deeds, ethical conduct, etc.”** The Scripture used to justify this is Ecclesiastes 7:20, which reads:

*“For there isn’t a righteous person on earth who does [only] good and never sins.”*

And also Isaiah 59:1-2:

*“ADONAI’s arm is not too short to save, nor is his ear too dull to hear. Rather, it is your own crimes that separate you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he doesn’t hear.”*

The third “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: **“The Messiah is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through him you can know God’s Love and Plan for your life.”** The Scripture used to justify this is Leviticus 17:11, that says:

*“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for yourselves; for it is the blood that makes atonement because of the life.”*

And also, Isaiah 53:5-8:

*“But he was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our sins; the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises we are healed. We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet ADONAI laid on him the guilt of all of us. Though mistreated, he was submissive—he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to be slaughtered, like a sheep silent before its shearers, he did not open his mouth. After forcible arrest and sentencing, he was taken away; and none of his generation protested his being cut off from the land of the living for the crimes of my people, who deserved the punishment themselves.”*

The fourth “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: **“We must receive Messiah Yeshua as Savior and LORD by personal invitation.”** The Scripture used to justify saying this is Psalm 2:12, which states:

*“Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and you perish along the way, when suddenly his anger blazes. How blessed are all who take refuge in him.”*

And also [John 1:11-13](#) and [3:5-7](#) that teach how to receive the Messiah by faith:

*“He came to his own homeland, yet his own people did not receive him. But to as many as did receive him, to those who put their trust in his person and power, he gave the right to become children of God, not because of bloodline, physical impulse or human intention, but because of God.”*

*“Yeshua answered, “Yes, indeed, I tell you that unless a person is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. What is born from the flesh is flesh, and what is born from the Spirit is spirit. Stop being amazed at my telling you that you must be born again from above!”*

Continuing with the next way we have been taught to minister Yeshua to Jewish unbelievers, number five is inviting the unbeliever to a small group teaching or discussion. Number six is nurturing a friendship relationship with him and ministering Yeshua to him when the time is right. Number seven is allowing the way we conduct our life to be a witness of our faith, number eight is serving the unbeliever’s needs and those for whom he/she cares, and number nine is (of course) praying for the unbeliever’s salvation. All of these are good and effective if done at the direction of the Holy Spirit. Also, we are not to become discouraged if we do not see results. In my own case, for example, the Lord brought quite a few believers across my path before the Holy Spirit convicted me with his presence.

I promised to introduce you to a method of evangelism that is biblical but not often used; it is inspired by [Romans 1:18-21](#), which I will read to you in its entirety because it is very important:

*“What is revealed is God’s anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth; because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities—both his eternal power and his divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse; because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened.”*

[Verses 19 and 20](#) of what I just read say that godless and wicked people are without excuse for not knowing God because God’s qualities (“his eternal power and his divine nature”) are clearly seen from “*what he has made.*” “What he has made” is another way of saying God’s creation. I am assuming that no one here is in the category of being godless and wicked, so I will address the remainder of my remarks to we who already know God the Father, Yeshua, and the Holy Spirit, but want to minister to persons who do not.

How can [Romans 1:19-20](#) make such a sweeping statement—that everyone, everywhere, can know the truth about God merely by observing his creation? If we were to point to some item of God’s creation that is in plain sight and ask a typical unbeliever to explain how it could have come about without God, he would very likely respond with the Darwinism he has been taught—that it came about from organic compounds in the oceans combining and, through natural selection, evolving to its present state. Now to me, the logic of that happening is so implausible as to defy reason and even imagination, but not to a person who has been taught Darwinism and has not yet had a personal

encounter with God. Darwin's theory of evolution as applied to species is a formidable obstacle to sharing God's existence and the truth of Yeshua.

I would fare no better were I to show the unbeliever what the Bible says about God and Yeshua because unbelievers do not believe the Bible. Now the negative picture I have painted does not mean that I should not try, because (1) it is my obligation under the instruction of [Matthew 28:16-20](#), and (2) the Holy Spirit might anoint my words and make himself known to the unbeliever in the midst of my witnessing to him or afterwards and that, of course, will make all the difference. But whether or not I see anything positive come of it, I have an obligation to the unbeliever to bring him the truth of God's existence and the salvation brought by Yeshua. Although I cannot predict when God will come to him, I can nevertheless bring him face-to-face with God and Yeshua by speaking Words of Scripture and effectively pointing to God's creation.

But what is an effective presentation of God's creation? I previously indicated that unbelievers tend to reject the idea of God's existence or the "Messiahship" of Yeshua even after being shown God's creation and challenged to explain by logic how it could have come about without God. To overcome the unbeliever's skepticism, I recommend not only showing him God's creation in nature but, in particular, drawing his attention to nature's goodness and beauty. I will ask him: "Do you see beauty in this tree?" "Do you see beauty in this other tree?" "Do you see beauty in all of these trees?" He will probably say "yes," and I will then ask him: "How come? The reason the unbeliever will see beauty in the trees I show him is because he, being part of God's creation and having been made in God's image, has an instinctive understanding of goodness and beauty. I will then point out to him that there is no logic to beauty, and no evolutionary usefulness to it. Trees are just as functional in adding oxygen to the environment, just as useful to birds nesting, and just as survivable in a forest crowded by other trees, were they ugly instead of beautiful. Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection does not explain why the natural world is filled with such beauty and why human beings recognize beauty. The unbeliever may struggle a bit, but the truth of this will not be lost on him.

As an "aside," we ought not think that intentionally observing God's creation is only for the unbeliever. The rest of us have a need to regularly encounter God our Father and Yeshua our Messiah, and one of the most enjoyable ways of encountering them is to observe and contemplate what God has made—the creation that God himself said was very good and that [John 1:1-10](#) says was made through Yeshua. If you have forgotten the Scripture to which I am referring, I will remind you; it says:

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not suppressed it. There was a man sent from God whose name was Yochanan. He came to be a testimony, to bear witness concerning the light; so that through him, everyone might put his trust in God and be faithful to him. He himself was not that light; no, he came to bear witness concerning the light. This was the true light, which gives light to everyone entering the world. He was in the world—the world came to be through him—yet the world did not know him."*

We are years later and even now most people (Jews included) do not know him.

You have no doubt noticed that in speaking of God’s creation, I have associated goodness with beauty and have shown you how observing the beauty of God’s creation can impress an unbeliever and bring him to the place of considering the existence and nature of God. Now permit me to get a little technical but still stay on topic:

Genesis 1:1-31 says that God saw, on five of the six days of creation, that what he had made was “good.” In the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew word used for “good” in all five of the days is “*ki-tov*.” Now although “*tov*” is very often translated as “good,” “good” is not the only possibility. In fact, the word (and concept of) “good” is hard to define. What, for example comprises that which is good? The way something looks? The way it feels? The way it tastes? The way it works? When we consult the prestigious Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon<sup>21</sup> for the definition of “*tov*,” we get all of these possibilities: (1) good; (2) pleasing; (3) delightful; (4) delicious; (5) sweet or savory; (6) pure and clean; (7) cheerful; (8) happy; (9) glad; (10) joyful; (11) kind; (12) acceptable; (13) vigorous; (14) excellent; (15) fair; and (16) beautiful. It is this last definition—“beautiful”—that I suggest is a very important way to translate “*tov*” in Genesis 1:1-31, because then the verses of Genesis read:

On day 1 God created light, and “*God saw that the light was beautiful.*”

On day 2 God separated sky from water, and on day 3 he created land, the seas, grass, plants, fruit trees and seed-bearing fruit, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

On day 4 God created day and night, seasons, days, years, the sun, the moon and the stars, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

On day 5 God created swimming creatures, birds, sea creatures and creeping creatures, all of which could reproduce, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

On day 6 God created other living creatures, livestock, crawling animals, wild beasts, and man, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

Finally, at the end of day 6, just before he rested on the *Shabbat*, “*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very beautiful.*”

Now perhaps you are thinking that substituting “beautiful” for “good” as a translation of “*tov*” is forcing the translation in order to suit the purposes of this message. Well, to show you that it is not, here are three occurrences in Genesis where a derivative of “*tov*” is translated as “beautiful” or “attractive” in the NKJ, NIV, NAS, and yes, even in the Jewish Publication Society’s TNK.<sup>22</sup> In the CJB:

Genesis 24:16: “*The girl was very beautiful,*” The Hebrew word used for “beautiful” is “*tovat*.”

Genesis 26:7: “*After all, she is a beautiful woman.*” The Hebrew word used for “beautiful” is “*ki-tovat*.”

<sup>21</sup> *New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, pp. 373-376, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers 1979).

<sup>22</sup> 1985 JPS *Tanakh*.

Genesis 6:2: “...the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were attractive;” The Hebrew word used for “attractive” is “*ki-tovat*.”

It is similar in many other Scriptures; for example, in Esther 1:11, the word for “beautiful” is “*ki-tovat*.” In Daniel 1:4, it is “*v’tovei*” in 1 Samuel 9:2 its first occurrence is “*v’tov*,” and further in the verse it is “*tov*.” And in 2 Samuel 11:2 the Hebrew word is “*tovat*.” All of these are variations of the Hebrew word “*tov*,” and all are translated “beautiful.” And if we use it in Psalms 106:1, we get:

*“Give thanks to ADONAI; for he is beautiful, for his grace continues forever.”*

Not bad—in fact, beautiful! So, I recommend adding to the other methods we may use, the approach of bringing the unbeliever face-to-face with the beauty of God’s creation and asking him: “How do you think that happened?” and “Who do you think did that?”

—CJB



## Communicating Friendship to Jewish People

*Delivered October 6, 2018*

This message is about communicating friendship to the Jewish People for friendship's sake—not about having an agenda of evangelizing them. The Bible has many positive things to say about friendship and even God called two men his friends:

Exodus 33:11: *“So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”*

James 2:23: *“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”*

Moses and Abraham were friends to God but most of my Jewish brothers today are not friends to Yeshua, so why ought we seek to be friends to them? Let us consider these Scriptures:

Job 6:14: *“To him who is afflicted, kindness should be shown by his friend, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty.”*

Leviticus 19:18: (which is the basis of Yeshua's teaching): *“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”*

John 15:13: *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.”*

Romans 11:28: (where Paul is speaking to Gentiles when he says of the Jews): *“Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.”*

According to Scripture, we are to love even those whom we consider our enemies:

Matthew 5:43-44: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ‘But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,”*

If we do these things for Jewish people—even Jewish unbelievers in Yeshua—love them, do good to them, and pray for them without regard for how we are treated in return, we are acting toward them as friends.

Before I leave this particular point I want to deal with a Scripture that is often misapplied as it relates to Jewish people and is the cause of some not being willing to have a normal friendship with them:

2 Corinthians 6:14-15: *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Messiah with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”*

To begin with, we Jews are no different than any other people in that we can choose to believe in God or not, or to believe in Yeshua or not, and in either case, to conduct our lives in either godly or ungodly ways. The way that the above Scripture is often misapplied to Jews is to assume that the term “unbeliever” only means “unbeliever in Yeshua,” and that the comparison of “light with darkness” equates belief in Yeshua with “light,” and unbelief in Yeshua with “darkness.” I do not believe that that is the Scripture’s intent.

Let us first compare “righteousness with lawlessness,” terms that are also in the Scripture. Could the Scripture possibly be inferring that a Jew who believes in Yeshua is automatically counted as righteous while a *Torah*-observant Jew who does not believe in Yeshua yet believes in God and seeks to fulfill all of God’s commandments in the best way he knows is lawless? How can a person be lawless whose approach to God is attempting to fulfill God’s Law?

Now let us look at the comparison of “Messiah with Belial.” Who is this “Belial?” He is a demon referenced in the apocryphal Book of Jubilees, where uncircumcised heathens are called “sons of Belial.” He also appears in the Latin Vulgate and in the King James version of the Bible as symbolizing the personification of evil.

So now the meaning of 2 Corinthians 6: 14-15 should be clear. It is not comparing Jews who believe in Yeshua with those who do not. It is contrasting the light of those who believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with the darkness of heathens and doers of evil. It is for this reason that I do not refer to Jews who do not believe that Yeshua is the Messiah yet are *Torah*-observant as “unbelievers.” I may say that they are unbelievers in Yeshua, but I never just call them unbelievers.

### **Understanding our Own Identities**

Before we attempt to befriend a Jewish person or anyone else for that matter, we ought to understand and be at peace with our own identities.

Some of us here are Jews as I am. Although we are at odds with many of our Jewish brothers regarding the identity of Yeshua, we are nevertheless family, and our family attitude toward one another ought to come through. Some of us here are Gentiles, and although we have joined our lives with Jews, worship as Jews, and are members of a Messianic Jewish community, we nevertheless are not genetic carriers of the Abrahamic Covenant. Yet, as grafted-in Gentile believers in Yeshua (Romans 11), we are beneficiaries of and participants in the Covenant, and we have become equal members in what Ephesians 2:12 refers to as the Commonwealth of Israel. So, although we are not “family-in-the-faith” with all Jews, we are fellow citizens with them in the Commonwealth.

One reason it is important to take stock of and be at peace with our respective identities is that our Messianic identities are likely to surface in the course of our becoming friends with Jews. For example, if we are Jewish, we will almost certainly be asked why we have abandoned the beliefs of our fathers. And if we are Gentiles, we may have to convey assurance that we will not turn against and persecute Jews in the future as Gentiles have in the past.

## Understanding Jewish People

There is much to understand about Jewish people and our time is much too short to address the subject completely. I will, however, try to hit some important points.

A first thing to understand is that there is no universal characteristic of a Jewish person. Jews come in all colors, all languages, all personalities, all cultures, all citizenships, and all beliefs. Not far from the truth is the story of the Chinese rabbi who greets the New York rabbi by saying: “Funny, you don’t look Jewish!” Being a Jew is defined biblically only by our genetic lineage and circumcision (Genesis 17:4, 6-7, 19-21; 26:1-4; 28:10-14; 35:9-12; 48:3-4; 50:24-25.

It is also important to distinguish between who is a Jew and what is “Jewish.” Although the Bible does not define “Jewish,” it is what many Jews base their identities on and so it cannot be disregarded. A Jew does not normally recognize another as Jewish by his genotype or circumcision (although if someone’s mother is Jewish, he or she is considered Jewish); he recognizes him by his history and his culture. Where did he come from? Does he claim to be a Jew? Did his parents claim to be Jews? Does he attend a synagogue? Does he pray the siddur? Has he a connection to Israel or to the Holocaust? Does he speak or understand Yiddish? Hebrew? Ladino? Is he Torah-observant to any degree? Does he keep the Feasts? Keep the Sabbath? Keep kosher? Does he resonate with Jewish humor? Recognize Jewish foods? Does he affiliate with one of the branches of Judaism?

Despite our considerable diversity and at the risk of generalizing, I admit that we Jews are known for having a few characteristics in common. We argue a lot—particularly with other Jews. We hate being missionized by Christians. We value family, education, intellect, and professional achievement. We fear assimilation, and we value being Jewish even if we do not fully understand what that means.

Curiously, not all Jews are secure in their sense of Jewish identity; I suspect that this is partly a legacy of the holocaust and our history of Christian Goyim telling us that we are inferior, heretical, evil, and “Christ-killers.” But it also comes from strife within our communities where certain Jews discriminate against and reject other Jews. In Israel there exists enmity toward Orthodox (religious) Jews for certain reasons, toward Messianic Jews for other reasons, toward *Chassidim* for still other reasons, and toward Ethiopian Jews for every reason. Then, of course, there is payback by the Orthodox who have significant political control over *aliyah* and do not recognize marriages or conversions other than their own.

What this means in a practical sense is that the person who wants to have Jewish friends should look for and become familiar with his friends’ sensitivities and avoid stumbling into areas of unhealed hurts and insecurities.

## Self-Imposed Impediments to Friendship

Gentiles in our Messianic congregations sometimes think that it is easier for the Jewish members to befriend Jews than it is for them. That is often not the case because Jews expect Gentiles to believe in Yeshua, while a Jew who believes in Yeshua is often perceived as a threat and a traitor to Judaism. Whether we are Jews or Gentiles, there are certain presuppositions and fears that we may harbor that could cause us to draw back from pursuing friendship with Jews in the wider Jewish Community. I will mention some of the more common ones.

Fear of rejection is a “biggie” because we have heard that the Jewish Community is hostile both to Yeshua and to those of us who believe in him. I am not going to guarantee that your overture of friendship to a Jewish person will not be rebuffed, but I can assure you that if you act in faith you will not be scarred by it and, if you persist, you will eventually find yourself with a circle of Jewish friends whom you will enjoy and who will enjoy you.

Another common presupposition is that the Jewish community is closed to outsiders and, if you are either a Messianic Jew or a non-Jew, there is no way you will ever be able gain access. That is simply not true. There are always going to be some people, Jews included, whose main purpose in life seem to be to exclude others. You’ll run into them, but there are many others whose nature it is to warmly welcome newcomers—even those who are unlike themselves.

Let me share something that I observed, and what was told to me by an African-American Gentile member of a local Messianic Jewish congregation. One day she and I met at an Orthodox-owned Jewish bookstore where I was known to be a Messianic Jew and was, nevertheless, always treated well. I noticed (it surprised me) that the store’s elderly Jewish owner appeared to know my friend. When we left the store, I inquired of her and she told me that several years earlier she had introduced herself as a believer in Yeshua to the store’s owner. Instead of being put off, the store’s owner asked her if she would like to experience an Orthodox Jewish service and, when she said “yes,” he invited her to visit his synagogue as his guest. She took him up on his offer and, when she arrived at the synagogue, she was greeted courteously by others in a way that was apparent she was expected. After the service, she was introduced to the rabbi as being “a devout woman,” and the rabbi took time to explain things about the service in a most gracious way. That was one occasion. Another time when she visited the bookstore, the owner was just returning from his grandson’s *b’rit milah* and, when he saw her, he said to her: “Had I known how to contact you, I would have invited you to the *b’rit*.” I think these two examples make my point.

Another presupposition that inhibits some Gentiles from seeking Jewish friends is that they think that Jews know so much more about the Bible than they, and that they will discredit themselves in conversations that turn religious or theological. Sure, some in the Jewish Community are scholars, but relatively few. My personal experience is that most Messianic Jews and Gentiles with several years in the Faith have a much greater command of the Bible than the average synagogue-attending Jew, and almost certainly more than any secular Jew. Still, no one knows everything; that is why we have each other from whom we can learn and receive advice if we find ourselves over our heads.

Another thing that can interfere with forming friendships is the temptation to preach the Gospel prematurely to persons whom the Holy Spirit has not yet prepared. Unless the Holy Spirit directs otherwise, it is often best to just be a friend and trust God to handle the rest.

### **Meeting Jewish People**

There are two basic things to do if we want to meet a Jewish person. The first is to pray for God to arrange a meeting. The second is to be where Jewish people normally are.

Many of us can meet Jewish people naturally through casual encounters at work, at school, at supermarket checkouts, and just about anywhere. If we have asked God to bring Jewish people across our

paths, then we need to be expectant and alert for when it happens and not lose the moment. Also, we ought to have a plan thought out for who, how, and under what circumstances we will encourage a second meeting if God provides us with the first.

Places where Jewish people hang out are where WE should be hanging out, but how many of us do? We should all be checking at least one local Jewish newspaper regularly in order to find Jewish-sponsored activities of our liking that we can attend. I stress “of our liking” because we want to meet Jewish people who have common likes and interests. The local Jewish Community Center is a great place to meet Jewish people and, by the way, JCC memberships are not limited to Jews. Are we motivated to support Israel? There are many organizations dedicated to supporting Israel, and guess what? Most of their members are Jews. If we live in a neighborhood where there are Jewish people, joining the neighborhood watch or other civic organization will bring us into contact with potential Jewish friends. And do not forget the local synagogue. I heard that there are occasionally some Jews there too. The point I am trying to make is that it is not hard to meet Jewish people if we are willing to get off our couch and go to where Jewish people are.

### **Friendship Is what We Most Have to Offer.**

Jewish people are no different than other people in their having needs that friends can sometimes help satisfy. Knowing about Yeshua and the good news is, of course, one of those needs, and we have to be alert for when the Holy Spirit tells us that the moment is right. But I have noticed another need that many Jewish people have; it is to be told that being Jewish is important, and why it is important.

Hearing me say that may surprise you because the Scriptures clearly explain the importance of being Jewish. The problem is that most Jewish people are not educated in the Scriptures and therefore their concept of Jewish identity is a combination of culture, nostalgia, and regret. Culture, because most of us Jews have arrived at adulthood with memories and experiences that we associate with being Jewish. Nostalgia, because many of those memories and experiences are sweet to us in that they remind us of our youth and of loved ones who may now be departed. Regret, because some of the memories are also painful, as some of us have lost family members to persecutions, have experienced personal rejections, and have been denied professional, economic, and social opportunities. Most of us who are Jews have been reminded that we are different from other people, and not necessarily in a complementary way. As a result, some of us are suspicious of non-Jews and fully expect the time when our Gentile neighbors will once again turn against us. Many Jews support Israel, not because Israel is the prophetic fulfillment of God’s promise, but because it is a place of refuge to where Jews can escape when the pogroms start up again.

Jewish people need to be made aware that the real value of being a Jew is being a servant of God and a preserver of *Torah*—not only for ourselves, but for the nations of the world. We need to be reminded that circumcision is more than just a custom—it is a mark of the Covenant that God made with Abraham and Abraham’s family through Isaac and Jacob, to make them a priestly nation destined to bring knowledge of Messiah to the world. We need to be reminded to not turn inward but rather to turn outward, for to us has been given the privilege and responsibility of leading the nations in spreading the Word of God (including the *B’rit Chadashah* and the Good News of Yeshua) to the rest of the world. We need to embrace the biblical truth that “dying to self” for God is not defeat but rath-

er great gain, and we especially need to embrace the *mitzvah* to forgive all and love even those who have harmed us.

An area in which Messianic Jews and Gentiles are uniquely equipped is providing information and advice to mixed marriage Jewish families. Many Jews in the wider Jewish community are married to Christians. Mixed marriages ought to be our specialty because, not only do we have experience with mixed marriages among ourselves, but we understand covenant and biblical history better than most and stand theologically in a place that reconciles Judaism with most of the beliefs of Christianity. We are a community that is ready and willing to receive mixed marriage families and to disciple them toward fulfilling their covenantal responsibilities.

Finally, and probably most important, what we have to offer a Jewish friend is friendship itself. Jews are no different than other people. Some are lonely, some are needy, and some have interests they are burning to share with others. Being a friend is both give and take. The best way to be a friend to a Jewish person is to forget about being Jewish or Gentile and seek to relate as simply one person to another.

### **DOs and DON'Ts of Jewish Friendship**

The most important part of developing Jewish friendships is to be genuine. We ought not talk down to nor unduly raise friends up merely because they are Jewish. Also, as with most nationalities, events of history and human conflicts have produced fears and sensitivities among Jewish people of which we need to be aware. From antiquity, but especially since the middle ages, Jews have been called “Christ Killers,” been accused of causing the bubonic plague, were reputed to have ritually killed Christian children, been said to have seized control of the world’s economies, and on and on. In Spain and Portugal, many were killed for their beliefs, some were exiled, and some were forcibly converted to Catholicism. Even Nazi Germany cloaked itself with the trappings of Christianity through its use of iron crosses, twisted crosses, and the complicity of several mainline Christian denominations and clerics.

What definitely does not help a Jewish friendship is using the common evangelistic word “convert.” In the Bible, the word “convert” merely means to change our nature and embrace God. To most Jews, however, the term “convert” means to stop being a Jew and become a “Christian.” Certain words are so deeply ingrained within Judaism as negative, that in relating to Jewish friends, terminology becomes very important. On the American Jewish scene, “Christ,” “cross,” “baptize,” “church,” and “convert” are not favorable terms because Jews associate them with being “not Jewish,” and with those who have persecuted us. That is why most Messianic Jewish congregations ask their members to use equivalent terms such as “Messiah,” “execution stake,” “immerse,” “congregation,” and “receive Yeshua.” It is also why we DON’T display crosses or wear them as jewelry. It is also why Messianic Jews DON’T refer to themselves as Christians. Please take this seriously. It is egregious to the Jewish ear to hear a member of a Messianic Jewish congregation say he is “going to church” when he means his congregation or synagogue.

There are several other “DON'Ts” I can mention, but let me remind you of just one that I mentioned earlier. DON’T refer to a Jew who believes in God but does not yet believe in Yeshua as “unsaved” or as an “unbeliever.” If a Jewish person believes in God, he or she is not an “unbeliever”—he or she

is a “believer” in God, but possibly not in Yeshua. It is insulting and wrong to call a person who believes in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob an “unbeliever” without qualifying what we mean. As for calling such a person “unsaved,” that, in my opinion, is a judgment that none of us is entitled to make, for only God can read hearts and minds. That expression, if it gets back to your Jewish friend, will likely result in his being your *former* Jewish friend.

Now for some “DOs.” As a Messianic Jew or closely affiliated Gentile, DO keep a “Jewish” home. Keep some level of *kashrut* even if it is limited just to abstaining from pork and shellfish. Maintain a small Jewish library for your reading and reference; even one shelf will do. DO display Jewish artifacts, and DON’T display crosses and pictures of Jesus.

DO have Bible knowledge, and at least a conversational knowledge of contemporary Judaism. Know the basics of Jewish history and its intersection with Church history and be conversant with the most obvious and convincing of the Messianic prophecies (e.g. [Isaiah 53](#) and [Psalms 22](#)).

DO know your way around the *siddur*—especially those prayers commonly used on the Sabbath and know how to pray the prayers in Hebrew.

DO develop a vocabulary of Jewish terms—terms like *Tanakh*, *mashiach*, *Torah*, *mishpochah*, etc. This will help you in conversations with traditional Jewish people.

DO be prepared to explain why you believe in Yeshua, and to give an account of your life both before and after you came to faith.

DO be prepared to answer typical Jewish questions such as “How can a Jew believe in Yeshua and still call himself a Jew?” Also, be prepared to answer common objections such as “If he is *Mashiach*, why do we still have wars?”

DO show hospitality by inviting your friend to your home and DO accept invitations to his or hers. Plan to share meals and know how to conduct an *Erev Shabbat* table service.

DO look for common interests and non-religious activities to enjoy together. Normal friendships include sharing hobbies, family celebrations, and other activities.

DO invite your Jewish friend to your *chavurah* or your congregation’s Shabbat service once your identity as a Messianic Jew or Gentile is known. If your friend agrees to attend, describe the meeting to him in advance so he will be prepared for the experience.

Finally, and most important, DO pray for your friend and act toward him with confidence that he or she will eventually come to faith in Yeshua. Trust God for it and believe *Rav* Sha’ul’s prediction in [Romans 11:26-27](#) that one day “*all Israel will be saved.*”

—NKJ

## Counseling Biblically

*Delivered July 14, 2007*

Last *Shabbat* you heard a message about mentoring. You heard that mentoring ministry is “people helping people”—short term help for a variety of life’s problems, where the helpers are often the congregational members themselves. The reason that this is possible is that, in a congregation of our size, there is much knowledge, talent, and wisdom among the members that can be harnessed in helping other members. Special training is often not needed by the mentor, although sometimes it is, and many of our members have expertise in a wide variety of areas.

I should like to tell you of another ministry that is about to make its appearance in our congregation. It is called Biblical Counseling and is like mentoring in some ways, but it is more methodical and requires that the counselor be trained, and (ideally) certified. Like its secular counterpart, psychological counseling, it is a healing ministry that requires commitment to study and the emotional ability to help others who may be going through serious and painful challenges in their lives. Unlike psychological counseling, however, it does not employ the theories and therapies of men; rather, it employs the healing truths of Scripture, and claims, as its founder, God himself.

The goal of counseling, whether biblical or secular, is to help the counselee change himself or herself in such a way that something about his life improves. Counseling does not seek change anyone other than the counselee himself; it does not try to change one’s spouse, one’s children, one’s parents, one’s boss, or anyone else. The only change sought is to the counselee’s behavior and his or her reactions to circumstances.

The underlying assumption of all counseling is that change is possible, and each kind of counseling has theories for why that is so, and each has its own methods for achieving it. Freudian counseling, for example, assumes a subconscious, an ego and an id, and supposes that certain influences or occurrences in a person’s past are the cause of his current behavior and distress. Freudian therapy therefore seeks to probe back in time as the means of changing a person’s feelings and responses to life’s circumstances; the process is known as psychoanalysis and its founder was Dr. Sigmund Freud a self-proclaimed atheist. Skinnerian therapy is, perhaps, the most radically opposite to the Freudian approach. Burrhus Frederic Skinner, also an atheist, did not care at all about a person’s past. His supposition was that any animal’s or person’s behavior could be modified through operant conditioning—that is, through positive and negative reinforcement; he demonstrated his theory with rats in a special cage that gave the rats food each time they tapped on a bar. The assumption of Skinnerian therapy is that reinforcing stimuli (both positive and negative) can be used on people as well as on rats and that, like with rats, operant conditioning can be used to modify human behavior.

Now although Freud’s and Skinner’s theories and practices are quite different, they have two similarities worthy of note. First, their theories of human behavior reflect the fact that they were both atheists. Second, while they both sought to achieve change in human behavior, neither had a standard for the kinds of behaviors that ought to be changed, and neither had a standard for what substitute behaviors were acceptable. One presumes, therefore, that they would have considered any result a success that was satisfactory to their patient or counselee.



In stark contrast, Biblical Counseling is a therapy authored by God himself. Underlying its claim of validity is not mere theory, but biblical truth. And, unlike secular therapies, Biblical Counseling has a specific criterion of which of our behaviors ought to change; they are those behaviors that God calls sin. Furthermore, unlike secular therapies, Biblical Counseling has a standard for what our behaviors ought to change to; they are those that conform to God's laws of faith and righteousness.

Let me illustrate what I mean with an extreme example but one that actually occurred. Some years ago, there was a newspaper account of a New York psychologist who claimed a therapy that cured marijuana habit with a 100% rate of success. His method was to have his marijuana-addicted patients engage in daily sex orgies and, after one or two of these so-called treatments, they felt so good that they stopped smoking marijuana and managed to stay drug free—that is, so long as the orgies continued. Now this was touted as a great success in behavior modification because the patients achieved what they came for. They came to give up marijuana and left marijuana-free. By biblical standards though, it was not a success. By biblical standards, the patient came in with one sin and left with another; biblically, they had gained nothing and perhaps even increased the level of their sin. Bizarre as this story is, it is the logical result of a therapy that has no standard for what constitutes acceptable change.

Biblical Counseling—God's way of counseling—is different as night and day. It is based on the truth that sinful behavior hurts us and that if we turn away from sin and toward righteousness our lives will improve, and we will be overcomers of life's adversities; in short, we will achieve *shalom*. Scripture taught the Israelites under Moses (and teaches us):

*Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."*

And Scripture goes on to list the blessings and cursings, and the specifics of choosing life by giving the Israelites statutes and judgments to which their conduct would have to conform. Later, Jeremiah prophesies of a "new covenant"—one that will give the Israelites (and by implication us) the power to keep God's covenant and God's law:

*Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34): "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—"not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

Secular counseling claims some successes that I do not doubt. Biblical Counseling, however, is based on God's law, and its success rate is very high for those who are willing to bring their lives into conformity with it.

All forms of secular counseling have a method, and so does Biblical Counseling. A Freudian analyst may put you on a couch for 12 years and a Rogerian therapist will draw you out but never direct you because his operative theory is that the client knows better than the therapist. People tend to like these kinds of therapies because they are non-directive and non-confrontative and, in that way, they are easy to endure if you can afford the therapist's hourly fee. There is a song we used to sing for fun; it goes this way:

*“Oh, Doctor Freud! Oh, Doctor Freud!  
How I wish that you were otherwise employed.  
For my set of circumstances sure enhances the finances  
Of the followers of Dr. Sigmund Freud!”*

Cost aside, Biblical Counseling is very different from most secular therapies because it is based on confrontation—confrontation of sin. It is highly directive and assumes that the counselor *does* know better than the counselee—that he or she knows the Scriptures, is able to identify sin in the counselee's life, and is willing and able to direct the counselee to give up his sin and replacing it with righteous conduct. It is probably the most uncomfortable form of counseling of all, because it is bold, it is direct, it is authoritative, and it demands change—not twelve years on the couch, but more like three weeks from now. And it works because it is based on God's promises.

It is quite amazing. When I was studying psychology, my professors (who were often messed up in the head themselves) could never give assurances that any of the techniques they taught would actually work. After I began to learn and apply Biblical Counseling, however, I became so sure of its efficacy that I would promise the counselee 100% success so long as he or she was willing to turn his or her life over to God. And I can testify to this day, that the only times there was not success was when the counselee was not willing and did not.

Let me now tell you a little about the mechanics of Biblical Counseling. First of all, it is based on the counselee's willingness to do things God's way rather than man's way. Permit me to read from one of our textbooks entitled “Self-Confrontation” where a comparison is given:

< Read from “Self-Confrontation,” pages 75-76 ><sup>23</sup>

So, we see from this that we must compare our ways to God's ways and when we find them not in agreement, we have to give up on our own and adopt God's.

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<sup>23</sup> John C. Broger, Developer, *Self-Confrontation: A Manual for In-Depth Discipleship* (Palm Desert, Calif.: Biblical Counseling Foundation, 1977).

Now the actual process of biblical change is based upon Ephesians 4:17-32, but I will explain it by reading just verses 22 through 24:

*“that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”* (see also, 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16).

So, there are three steps to biblical change:

1. Put off the conduct of the old man. That’s our conduct that seemed acceptable before we knew God’s standard.
2. Be renewed in the spirit of our minds. That process starts with our becoming born again of the spirit, but it must continue because our minds must catch up with our new spirits. In short, we must start thinking differently.
3. Put on the new man. That means, taking on the character and behavior of the person God wants us to be, and that He empowers us to be through his Holy Spirit.

Saying it another way, stop your sinful conduct, get your mind thinking God’s way, and replace your former conduct with redeeming godly conduct. Notice that it is not good enough to just stop doing something that is wrong. You cannot leave a vacuum. You have to replace it with new conduct which is right. A good example of this is Ephesians 4:28:

*“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”*

So, a Biblical Counselor who is helping a person leave a life of compulsive stealing would not only direct him to stop stealing, he would give him specific substitute directions like doing charitable work among the poor, giving both of himself and of his possessions. In other words, he would replace his wrongful and selfish conduct with charitable and sacrificial conduct—the exact opposite. Unless that last step of replacement is done, the person’s external conduct may change but his inner person has not. A noted Biblical Counselor is famous for posing the rhetorical question: “What do you call a person who has stopped stealing because he is afraid of getting caught?” His answer is: “You call him a thief who is not stealing.”

There is so much more that I can tell you, but my time is about up. Beginning in the Fall, we will begin to run classes in Biblical Counseling that will be assisted by the Biblical Counseling Institute currently operating in Washington D.C. The program will be intense and will require about two years to finish and achieve local certification. It will involve classroom attendance, home study, counseling under supervision, and finally internship. It will also lead the student in self-confrontation, the title of the first textbook, so that the logs in the student’s own eyes can be removed before he tries to remove

the splinters from anyone else's eyes (Matthew 7:4-5). Although an undergraduate degree is not required for admission to the program, the level of study will be graduate level, so significant commitment and a calling to this ministry is required. If we can get several of our members trained to counsel biblically, we will not only be in a position to help our brothers and sisters within our congregation, but we will be able to reach out to the surrounding community as well. By the way, age is no factor. We will accept youths into the program if we believe God has called them, provided they can put in the time without jeopardizing their other studies.

Please pray about whether God would call you to be a Biblical Counselor.

—NKJ

## Developing a Lifestyle of Personal Outreach

*Delivered November 5, 2011*

An early example in Scripture of an individual known for his lifestyle of personal outreach is Abraham. His principle form of outreach was hospitality, and we read in Genesis 18:1-8:

*“Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, “My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.” They said, “Do as you have said.” So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.” And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.”*

In his paper called “Abraham, Hospitality Man,” referring to early Jewish sources, Dr. David Rudolph writes:<sup>24</sup>

*“While Abraham was praised for many and various things, it was striking to see how united these texts were in emphasizing one particular characteristic of Abraham above the rest. Abraham was hospitality man.”*

There is another form of outreach taught in Scripture, one that was modeled by Yeshua himself; it is providing for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. Here are two Scriptures that illustrate it:

Matthew 25:37-40: *“Then the righteous will answer Him [i.e. Yeshua], saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”*

Acts 20:35: *“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Yeshua, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

Probably the best known kind of outreach is evangelism. Evangelism is carrying the truth about Yeshua to those who do not know him. It is no doubt so well known because it is specifically commanded by Yeshua to his disciples, whereas other forms of outreach in Scripture are taught by example and inference. One of Yeshua’s commandments is found in Matthew 10:5-8 which reads:

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24 D. J. Rudolph, “Abraham, Hospitality Man,” *Kesher*; #21, UMJC, July 2, 2006

*“These twelve Yeshua sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*

This was Yeshua’s directive to bring word of his Messiahship to the Jewish people, and we read, in Mark 16:14-20, how later he also directed his disciples to preach his messiahship to the entire world:

*“Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is immersed will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.”*

Yeshua did not send his disciples out to witness without provision. Before he left the earth to return to his father in Heaven, he promised that power would come to his disciples through the Holy Spirit. We read this in Acts 1:8:

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

We who are Yeshua’s 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples have that Holy Spirit power available to us as well and, in fact, we have a head start on Yeshua’s original disciples in that we are already in the world and therefore do not have to venture out into it as they did. What I mean by that is that we are not living, as they were, in an almost homogeneous Jewish community. When we go to school, to work, or to the market, we touch all kinds of people—Jews and non-Jews alike. And yes, we have access to the same Holy Spirit power as they; it is for us to but grab hold of it, and use it.

Some of us do personal outreach more than others, so let us receive this message as it may apply to each of us individually. For those of us who do not consciously and consistently look for ways to serve unbelievers through hospitality, physical provisions, or through engaging them about God and Yeshua, let us look at what things may be standing in our way. Offhand, there are seven that I can think of; some may apply and others not, but let us consider each of them:

The first and perhaps the most universal one is that our minds are set on other things. We do not wake each morning aware that we are disciples on a mission.

The second is that we have been taught that our religious beliefs are personal and not to be shared with others.

The third is that we do not want to be on a mission because we are self-absorbed and do not want to be diverted from those things that we deem more immediately important or more enjoyable.

The fourth is that we do not adequately think of ourselves as Yeshua's disciples. We have a *de minimis* opinion of our identity as disciples and of our knowledge and capability to contribute to others through the impartation of biblical knowledge.

The fifth is that we have been taught that outreach is what congregations do—not what we do privately.

The sixth is that we have too narrow and stereotypical a concept of what outreach is. We think of outreach as only evangelism that involves such things as pamphleteering at Metro stations, door-to-door visiting, and carrying signs with slogans! We mistakenly do not associate outreach with serving our neighbors in more general ways.

The seventh is fear; we fear engaging unbelievers. If the unbelievers are family, friends, or co-workers, we fear that urging them toward things of God will result in rejection or reprisal, and will interfere with our relationship. If the unbelievers are strangers, we fear their rejection, and making ourselves vulnerable to their verbal or physical abuse.

There are no doubt things we could add, but let us go back to the list we already have and talk briefly about each item in turn.

First on the list is distraction. Not only must we be aware of our outreach responsibilities, we must be convicted that God wants our lifestyle to be one of personal outreach. If we are not convicted, we will not do it. Do we truly believe that the Bible's examples of outreach and Yeshua's directives to his disciples to preach his *Besorah* (Good News) are meant for us as well? Each of us has to receive his or her own conviction about it directly from God, so if any of us are not yet convicted, we should pray to receive it. When we receive conviction that God indeed wants our lifestyle to be one of personal outreach, it will be natural for us to arise each morning with a conscious expectation that divine encounters await us.

In order to overcome the second item on the list, we must be convinced that we have been taught wrongly. Religion is not a personal matter; rather, it is our God-given responsibility to help all to know God, and the Good News of Yeshua.

The third item on the list has to do with the degree to which we are disciplined. Being self-absorbed and therefore not wanting to be diverted from things of our pleasure or concern in order to serve others is a sign that there is sinful flesh within us that is not yet crucified. Once we realize we have it, the fix for it is rid ourselves of it through repentance and obedience. Sorry, I wish it were easier.

The fourth item on the list is easier because it results from a mistake that we can easily correct. If we doubt our capability to be disciples, all we need do to dispel our inaccurate perception is to read about the original twelve and compare ourselves to them. One was a traitor (we're already way ahead of him), and the rest were no paragons of knowledge and brilliance. They were mostly

uneducated *am ha-aretz* (people of the land) yet Yeshua sent them out to teach and preach so, how could they have accomplished it? The answer is, through the power of the Holy Spirit that was available to them as it is to us. Besides, it takes little or no biblical knowledge to serve a person who is in his need or to testify as to how we came to know the Lord.

The fifth item on the list is also the result of a mistake that is easily corrected. Yes, most of us have been taught that “outreach” is some kind of organized congregational activity, but none of the biblical examples show that. On the contrary, the biblical example is disciples being sent out by Yeshua in pairs as we read in Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1 respectively:

*“And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits.”*

And the Luke passage:

*“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.”*

This is not accidental, for their there is power and authority where there are more than one:

Deuteronomy 19:15: *“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”*

Matthew 18:20: *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*

As for the sixth item on the list, I hope that any misunderstanding there may be about it will be corrected by this message. Evangelism is certainly outreach, but outreach is broader than just evangelism. It is any activity that blesses persons outside of our usual sphere of contact by serving their needs. As it pertains to this message, of course, it means serving “unbelievers in Yeshua.”

We perceive intuitively how both our witness and relationships formed from serving can lead to unbelievers coming to know Yeshua. There is also a Scripture we can rely on that links the two; it is 1 Corinthians 9:19, in which Paul says:

*“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;”*

It is an important Scripture to keep in mind and utilize.

The seventh item on the list is fear. The antidote for fear is a combination of love and faith because, according to 1 John 4:18:

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”*



Not only that. If we trust God with our lives, our possessions, and the lives of those whom we love, fear ceases to have any hold on us whatsoever.

Psalms 56:12(11): *“In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*

Perhaps this item of fear is the most difficult one on the list. When we first became believers, we confessed Yeshua as Lord and that was the same as testifying that we trusted God. Now we do not think much about trusting God until God tests us by giving us real-life choices that involve risk. The test comes in a variety of packages, but the choice is always to either trust God, or to try to “play it safe” by taking matters into our own hands.

That is the kind of choice we face when we encounter a person who needs to be told about God and Yeshua, and we know that he or she does not want to hear it. Difficult as it may be, we must do what is right and what we are called to, despite the likelihood of our being rejected. Nevertheless, doing outreach on some level is a biblical mandate for all of us, so let us approach it with faith, joy, and expectation.

—NKJ

## Discipleship

*Delivered September 16, 2006*

Some years ago, the word “discipleship” acquired a bad connotation among Messianic Jews and some evangelical Christians. It was because certain Christian churches, dubbed “discipleship movement churches” exceeded their biblical authorization by establishing a structure whereby every member of the church was subjected to the scrutiny, control, and authority of another member that was called his “discipler.” So, while professing to be making disciples of Messiah, they were instead making disciples of each other.

That brief period in the church’s history was very destructive because it prejudiced many believers against the words “disciple” and “discipleship,” and against what would have been a true biblical process had it been carried out in the right manner.

Consider, for example, Yeshua’s reference to his disciples in John 13:35:

*“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

And also, John 8:31-32:

*“Then Yeshua said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

Scripture teaches that another besides Yeshua had disciples—Isaiah! For in Isaiah 8:16 we read:

*“Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples.”*

But Isaiah’s disciples were not like Yeshua’s disciples in that Isaiah was not their master; they were merely following Isaiah so they could learn how to be prophets. Much later, at a time in history when the title “Rabbi” came to mean “master,” Yeshua warned in Matthew 23:8:

*“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.”*

Yeshua was not the only one whom men followed. Scripture also shows that men followed Yeshua’s disciples—especially Paul and Barnabas, for we read in Acts 13:43:

*“Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”*

However, Paul did not allow his followers to consider him their master, and made it clear that he was making disciples for Yeshua—not for himself; we read in 1 Corinthians 1:12-15:

*“Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Messiah.” Is Messiah divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you*

*baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.”*

Also, in 1 Corinthians 3:4-5:

*“For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?”*

Now that I have said what discipleship is not, let us turn to what it is. Discipleship, simply, is the growth process of becoming godlier—more like Yeshua, and more dependent on Yeshua. It is best illustrated in Matthew 11:28-30:

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

Of course, for those of us who have not yet come to him—never confessed our sins before him—never asked him into our hearts to be Lord of our lives and been born again of the Spirit—those are the first and most important steps toward becoming his disciples.

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us:

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

And of course, John 3:16 and 3:17 are well known:

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

Nothing takes precedent over that, so, if anyone here needs to take that first step of giving himself to Yeshua, the son of God, to be Lord of his life and his personal savior, don't wait another day. See me or any other leader right after this service and we will show you how you can leave here today, a new person with a new life.

Even those of us who have already taken that first step—who are already believers, born again of the Spirit—we too need to come to Yeshua regularly, confess our sins, and cast our cares upon him. The degree to which we are willing to do that is a measure of how disciplined we are. Many of us don't do it or don't do it often, preferring instead, to handle things by ourselves the way we used to in our old life. There's a 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian poem (set to music as a hymn)<sup>25</sup> that I often sing to remind myself not to do that; its first stanza goes this way:

*What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All my sins and griefs to bear!*

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph M. Scriven, 1855.

*What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O, what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer.*

I cannot help but think of that poem every time I encounter the Matthew 11:28-30 Scripture because both of them are true. So why *don't* we come to Yeshua for his rest when we need him? It is because of our old habits that we have dragged into the Kingdom with us—worldly pride where we have not yet fully died to self and given ourselves over to him completely. But dying to self is what being disciplined means and what Yeshua asks of us, for in Matthew 16:24-25 Yeshua cautioned his disciples:

*“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his stauros (his crucifixion stake) and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*

And the apostle Paul, perhaps the most highly disciplined person who ever lived, said in Galatians 2:20:

*“I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

Hudson Taylor referred to this process as “the exchanged life” because we, who are disciples of Yeshua, are called to exchange our lives for his.

So, looking back at Matthew 11:28, the first step in discipleship is heeding Yeshua’s words to bring our cares to him in order to receive rest for our souls. That is the part of being a disciplined person that takes faith—faith to die to self-desire and self-help so that God can take control! Yeshua demonstrated his faith by giving up his life so that we may live. And we who would call ourselves his disciples are called to emulate him by sacrificing our lives as well—not by dying physically as Yeshua did, but by sacrificial faith—being willing to die to self in order that we may serve others:

Romans 12:1: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”*

It is faith to prefer our brother or sister over ourselves:

Romans 12:10: *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;”*

It is faith to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to love our enemies as well:

Matthew 5:44: *“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,”*

It is faith to forgive those who have harmed us or would do us harm:

Matthew 18:21-22: *“Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Yeshua said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*

And Ephesians 4:32: *“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Messiah forgave you.”*

So, we who would be Yeshua’s disciples must first come to him, and then emulate his life of sacrifice by giving *our* lives over to him and to others.

Now let us look at how Yeshua disciplined. The method by which he taught was personal, and he treated his disciples as friends:

John 15:15: *“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”*

Yeshua’s disciples followed him wherever he ministered. They watched him and sought to do likewise and, when they failed, he corrected them and sent them out to do better the next time. That is the ideal and quintessential example of biblical discipleship.

—NKJ

## **Disputes, Discipline and Reconciliation in the Body of Believers**

*Delivered March 9, 2013*

Two weeks ago, I spoke to you on our need to forgive,<sup>26</sup> and I showed you Scriptures that define two kinds of forgiveness that I called “personal” (unconditional) forgiveness and “judicial” (conditional) forgiveness. I summarized the subject in the following three points:

1. Personal Forgiveness is unconditional, must be granted to believers and unbelievers alike, and clears the way for us to be forgiven by God (Mark 11:25-26).
2. Judicial Forgiveness, on the other hand, is conditional, and is only granted to a believer if an offended brother believes him to be repentant; this clears the way for the offender to be forgiven by God (Luke 17:3-4).
3. If we are sinned against, one of the first things we must do is exercise personal (or unconditional) forgiveness toward the offending person. This is vital because, unless we purge ourselves of unholy attitudes that have resulted from our being victims, we are not in a proper frame of mind or spiritual condition to follow through with decisions that are subsequently required of us.

Today, I want to speak further about how we are to handle disputes and offenses within local congregations and within the body of believers broadly. In doing so, I must apologize in advance that, while the subject is thoroughly biblical, it is also unavoidably technical; therefore, as you consider what is presented, keep Leviticus 19:18 in mind; that we must:

*“Treat other people as you would like them to treat you. Don’t take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI.”*

Now, let us begin.

There are two kinds of offenses against others that can be committed. I will call the first a “private” offense because it is the kind where one brother believer sins against another brother believer. A private offense within the body of believers is the biblical equivalent of what is called a “civil offense” in public or secular law. It is an offense (we call it a sin within the body of believers) committed by one individual against another individual. By contrast, a public offense within the body of believers is a sin committed by a brother against the body of believers broadly, analogous to what we call a criminal act in the secular law. So, to be clear regarding these definitions:

- A civil offense in secular law is an offense committed by a person against another person, and similarly, a private offense in biblical law is a sin committed by a brother against another brother.
- A criminal act in secular law is an offense committed by a person against society at large, and similarly, a public offense in biblical law is a sin committed by a brother against the body of believers at large.

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<sup>26</sup> Sermon repeated on April 21, 2018, herein H7.

Sometimes the same offense falls into both categories at the same time; permit me to give an example using Leviticus 19:16 which states:

*“Do not go around spreading slander among your people... .”*

A brother who gossips a falsehood about another brother to the assembly of brothers commits the private offense of slander against his brother in that he has damaged his brother’s reputation. On the other hand, he has also committed a public offense against the entire congregation because he has introduced a poisonous lie into it and has therefore injured or potentially injured everyone.

When an offense has been committed, the first thing one must do is decide if it is a private offense or a public offense, or both, because different Scriptures apply to each kind of offense, and the means of resolving each of them is therefore different. The way one decides is to ask oneself: “Who is adversely affected by the sin?” If it is one person or a specified number of persons, then the offense is private. If it is the community at large, then the offense is public.

First, private offenses: There are two parties to a private offense—the offender and the one who has been sinned against; let us call him the “offended.” As I said in my previous message, the first thing the offended party should do after forgiving his brother is to remember Proverbs 19:11 and decide whether he should overlook his brother’s sin. If you are the offended party and you choose to not overlook the sin, then you must seek reconciliation with your brother through the process given in Matthew 18:15-17, which requires that you first confront your offending brother with his sin:

Matthew 18:15: *“Moreover, if your brother commits a sin against you, go and show him his fault—but privately, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother.”*

Galatians 6:1: *“Brothers, suppose someone is caught doing something wrong. You who have the Spirit should set him right, but in a spirit of humility, keeping an eye on yourselves so that you won’t be tempted too.”*

There are three things in these Scriptures which stand out. First, when we go to our brother to correct him of his fault, our attitude must be pure, and our demeanor proper. The operative expression in the Galatians Scripture is “a spirit of humility.”

Second, we are to go to our brother alone. That means we are not to share our complaint with others before first giving our brother the opportunity to explain himself or repent and make things right.

Third, our purpose for confronting our brother must be to restore him to righteousness, and our hope must be for reconciliation. Although in cases involving damage or loss, we may also seek restitution as part of the reconciliation process, we must not sue our brother in a secular court. You may recall from my previous message that 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 prohibits it.

Time again for our spiritual grounding; let us read together:

*“Treat other people as you would like them to treat you. Don’t take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI.” (Leviticus 19:18).*

Now, if the offending brother agrees with the substance of our complaint and repents, the matter is concluded, and we must forgive him judicially. If he does not agree or he refuses to meet privately, Matthew 18:16 states that we must go to our brother again, and this time with two or three witnesses:

*“If he doesn’t listen, take one or two others with you so that every accusation can be supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”*

These witnesses need not be to the offense complained about (although they may be), but rather to what is said during that second meeting with our brother.<sup>27</sup> Our usual concept of witnesses is that they are silent observers but, in this case, they are there to help determine which of the parties to the dispute is wrong, and to urge that person to listen to reason and repent. This is made clear from the first words in Matthew 18:17:

*“If he refuses to hear them...”*

Note the word “*them*.” As before, if the parties come to agreement or the offending brother repents, the matter is concluded. If, however the attempt at reconciliation is unsuccessful, the remainder of verse 17 becomes operative:

*“If he refuses to hear them, tell the congregation;”*

Most theologians understand this to mean that a court (*bet din*) of congregational leaders (*bet din*) who are authorized to judge should be assembled.

Time for our spiritual reminder:

*“Treat other people as you would like them to treat you. Don’t take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI.” (Leviticus 19:18).*

Scripture does not say which elders ought to be assembled to hear a Matthew 18 controversy, but the natural assumption is that they are the elders of one’s own congregation. That works well when the disputants are members of the same congregation and the elders are not, themselves, parties to the dispute. But as with most of God’s instructions, the Matthew 18 process is designed to operate in an ideal biblical society. In the First Century, congregational elders oversaw entire cities, and sought to be in unity with the elders of other cities. This is rarely the case today, as the *ekklesia* of believers is fragmented, and local congregations often do not communicate with each other. Nevertheless, when needed, elders to judge matters can be drawn from related congregations and even from other New Covenant denominations.

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<sup>27</sup> Although not addressed in Scripture, fairness allows the offending brother to invite his own witnesses as well.



But we are not finished, because a *bet din* does not only hear cases, it renders judgment. So, after a hearing is held, the judging elders consider the evidence and render a judgment as to who is right, and who is wrong. They may also order certain remedies such as restraining orders, and orders of restitution. Upon final judgment, all parties to a *bet din* are required to obey or bear the sanction stated in Matthew 18:17:

*“...and if he refuses to listen even to the congregation, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax-collector.”*

This treating a believer as though he were not a believer is sometimes referred to as “disfellowship” or “excommunication.” It is a common misunderstanding that when a believer is excommunicated pursuant to Matthew 18 he must necessarily be ejected from the congregation. On the contrary, after excommunication, a professed believer should continue to be loved and be treated as an unbeliever in every way which includes extending to him our hospitality. Although he must be refused Holy Communion with the brethren, unless he is also a violator of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (i.e. walking in immorality while calling himself a believer) or Titus 3:10-11 (being divisive or otherwise being harmful to the body), he should be encouraged to attend congregational services and other events of the body where he is likely to hear the Word of God and be encouraged to repent and return to full fellowship. A very serious consequence of a Matthew 18 excommunication is, however, that the complainant is released from the constraint of 1 Corinthians 6:1-7, and is therefore free to sue the unrepentant excommunicant in a secular court of law.

Another common misunderstanding is that a decree of excommunication applies only to the excommunicating congregation or denomination. Biblically, that is not so. Judgments arising from Matthew 18 proceedings apply across the entire body of believers, and so long as correct biblical doctrine is applied and due process is afforded, congregations of all denominations are biblically required to recognize each other’s *bet din* judgments. What is more, God himself recognizes and honors the authority that He delegates to *batei din*, for we read in Matthew 18:18:

*“Yes! I tell you people that whatever you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”*

A judgment of “disfellowship” is reversible in the same way as the status of being an unbeliever is reversible. What is required is that the sanctioned brother repent of his former sin, comply with all orders of the *bet din*, and receive Yeshua again as his Lord and Savior. Ideally, the same *bet din* that ruled previously is convened to judge the professed repentance and, if it is deemed genuine, the tribunal sets aside its prior judgment and publishes a decree of restoration. This restoration which is bound on earth is also bound in heaven.

But what if the offender is us? Scripture speaks to that as well, for in Matthew 5:23-24 we read:

*“So if you are offering your gift at the Temple altar and you remember there that your brother has something against you, leave your gift where it is by the altar, and go, make peace with your brother. Then come back and offer your gift.”*

If we know or suspect that we have sinned against a brother, we are not to wait until the brother comes to us, we are to go to him. The renowned writer Jay Adams has been known to say that ideally, between Matthew 5 and Matthew 18, the offender and the one who is offended should meet in the street half-way between their respective homes because each is on his way to seek reconciliation with the other.

I have spent most of this message on private offenses because they are the kind that most often occur. However, public offenses within the body do occur from time to time, so let us look at those now.

A public offense within the body of believers is a sin committed by an individual against the entire congregational community or against believers at large. This kind of offense is the biblical equivalent of a criminal violation in the public sector. Public offenses pose a danger to the community, so the primary responsibility of a community's elders is to protect the flock by ministering correction and discipline to the offender. Hebrews 13:17a exhorts:

*“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your lives, as people who will have to render an account.”*

The goal in public offenses is different from the goal in private offenses. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 and 5:5, the Apostle Paul reveals how the Corinthians should deal with a particular public offense, and reconciliation is furthest from his mind when he says:

*“It is actually being reported that there is sexual sin among you, and it is sexual sin of a kind that is condemned even by pagans—a man is living with his stepmother! And you stay proud? Shouldn't you rather have felt some sadness that would have led you to remove from your company the man who has done this thing?”*

*“... hand over such a person to the Adversary for his old nature to be destroyed, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord.”*

You notice that here there is no Matthew 18 process; Paul is saying that the transgressor should have been summarily removed from fellowship.

An individual congregant is often the first person to become aware that a public offense has been or may have been committed. Although (according to Galatians 6:1-2) he may confront the perpetrator for the purpose of ministering correction and urging his brother to repent, he is not authorized to act for the community in either judging the matter or deciding what remedial action should be taken. Therefore, in all but trivial cases, the congregant-citizen's duty is to report the offense along with any evidence he may have to the community's elders.

When a believer is removed from fellowship as the result of his having committed a public offense, it is different from a Matthew 18 excommunication in that the offender is expelled from the community and denied even private fellowship until he repents and the elders no longer view him as a dan-

ger. In some quarters, this is called “shunning.” There are five behaviors in Scripture for which such expulsion may (or even must) occur:

- (1) A person considered a believer who is walking in unrepentant immorality, spoken to in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.
- (2) A person representing himself to be a believer who is in gross error by not being in accord with the Gospel and Apostolic doctrine, spoken to in 2 John 1:9-11 and Galatians 1:8-9.
- (3) A believer who is disorderly in his lifestyle, spoken to in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.
- (4) A divisive person (whether or not a believer) who has been warned twice, as spoken to in Titus 3:10-11 and Romans 16:17-18.
- (5) A rebellious person (whether or not a believer) who scoffs at the Word of God, spoken to in Proverbs 22:10.

In the first three cases, the danger to the body comes from the offender holding himself out (or being considered) to be part of the body—a believer—yet being in significant sin, professing heretical doctrines, or walking in a disorderly manner. While these traits are expected of unbelievers, a professing believer with such characteristics brings discredit to the body. Such behaviors can also present a stumbling block for new believers who are not yet fully disciplined, and whose discernment is not yet fully developed.

The fourth and fifth cases apply to all persons who sow discord, whether or not they are believers. It makes no difference that the divisiveness or rebellion is unconscious or unintended; it is dangerous and contagious in the community of believers, and those who practice it must be excluded.

In all five cases, repentance restores the offending brother to fellowship, and the unbeliever to being welcome once again. Restoration is not automatic, however, for whether or not an offender’s repentance is genuine, is a matter to be judged by the same elders who judged and disciplined him in the first instance.

A special case that should be mentioned is where a person has reason to believe that his brother believer has committed a significant violation of the public’s criminal law. Although a prudent covenantal first step would be to consult elders of the body for their wisdom in how to proceed, a brother may, nevertheless, go directly to the secular governing authorities, provided his reason for doing so is his concern for public safety, and he is relying on Romans 13:1 which states:

*“Everyone is to obey the governing authorities. For there is no authority that is not from God, and the existing authorities have been placed where they are by God.”*

There is so much more that I can say but let me end with some pastoral advice. As imperfect humans, we are all capable of offending and also of being offended. When either happens, the issues between us loom large, and we often go into a fighting stance because resolving them to our way of thinking seems paramount. If you remember nothing else about this message, remember these two things: (1) the difference between private and public offenses, and (2) that God considers reconciliation and maintaining our loving relationships with each other far more important than vindicating ourselves in any argument with our brother.

—CJB

## Fatherhood

*Delivered June 19, 2018*

Today is Father's Day, a day devoted to remembering and honoring fathers. What many do not know is that Father's Day, despite it being a secular holiday today, was conceived while sitting in the pew of a church in 1909. In May of that year, a woman by the name of Sonora Dodd was listening to a Mother's Day sermon and thought how nice it would be if there were a similar way to honor her father who had raised her and her five siblings after her mother had died in childbirth. She interested the political leaders of Spokane Washington in the idea, and the first Father's Day celebration was held in the city of Spokane on June 19, 1910. The idea caught on (but not quickly), and it took until 1972 for it to be recognized as a national holiday.

That is the way that Father's Day began, but we would not be discussing it here if we did not see a biblical connection in it. The biblical connection is, of course, "fatherhood," and the father of all fathers, God himself. There is nothing in the secular celebration of Father's Day that celebrates or even recognizes our Father in Heaven, but we see the connection, which is that the way in which our Father God fathers us (his earthly children) is the example of how we, who are earthly fathers, are to father our own children.

Although we call it "fatherhood," we could turn it around and call it "children hood" because the way in which we, born of earthly parents, are commanded to relate to our fathers on earth is, with few exceptions, how our Father in Heaven expects us to relate to him.

Let us begin, therefore, by looking back to the first biblical example of fatherhood, which is the fatherhood of giving life that we read about in Genesis 1:27:

*"So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them."*

That is our birth at creation, and we are very familiar with what came next which was that we who were God's children disobeyed. Our Father then said to us:

*"You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, .." (Genesis 2:16a-17a).*

And what did we do? As soon as we thought that our father was not looking, we tasted the fruit and had to be punished, for as our Heavenly Father instructed us in Proverbs 13:24:

*"He who fails to use a stick hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."*

And discipline us He did, with a very big stick that has come to be called the "fall of man," whereby he put a wall of separation between him and us until such time as, through the teachings and sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua, we would be in a spiritual condition to return to him in obedience.

The early part of the Bible discloses genealogies—father-to-son, father-to-son, until we come to a very special father, whom some are fond of calling “Father Abraham..” They call him that because he was selected by God to father many nations; in Genesis 17:1-7 we read:

*“When Avram was 99 years old ADONAI appeared to Avram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai [God Almighty]. Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted. I will make my covenant between me and you, and I will increase your numbers greatly.” Avram fell on his face, and God continued speaking with him: “As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.”*”

So, Abraham became the spiritual father of us all, but God’s covenant was not only with him, it was also with his descendants through Isaac, and Jacob, and the children of Israel, more recently known as the Jewish people. What I am suggesting is that those of us who are of Israel, i.e. Jews, are charged by God to be spiritual fathers to all others; as God proclaimed to Moses in Exodus 19:6:

*“...and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [priests] for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”*

And also, Isaiah 49:5-6:

*“So now ADONAI says—he formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Ya’akov back to him, to have Isra’el gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the sight of ADONAI, my God having become my strength—he has said, “It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya’akov and restore the offspring of Isra’el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth.””*

Also, regarding Israel, we read in Genesis 12:2-3:

*“I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

Some mistakenly believe that the blessing to Jews is because Israel is a favored nation. That is not correct. Israel is a servant and priestly nation, which is another way of saying a “father” nation to the other nations of the world and, as such, deserves the respect commanded in Ephesians 6:2a:

*“Honor your father and mother.”*

Of such significance did God consider his own fatherhood, that

*“He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*

And God’s son Yeshua honored his Father by his obedience of love. He said it and showed it in many ways and at many times, but here are just two of them:

*“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).*

*“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (John 15:10)*

So, we have spoken of God as being a father, Abraham as being a father, and Abraham’s descendants through Isaac and Jacob (the Jewish people) as being a father nation to the Gentiles. Let us now take a close look at the fathers with whom we are most familiar—our own fathers or, if we have children, ourselves. It is not accidental that so much in the Bible is about fathers and their children, for God the Father made us in his image. We have no indication that the Apostle Paul had children, but he considered himself a father to the Thessalonians to whom he ministered. We read in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-11:

*“You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children...”*

But fatherhood is a two-way street because we cannot adequately be a father if our children do not let us. That is why we read in Ephesians 6:1:

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”*

And again, in Colossians 3:20:

*“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.”*

So, today is Father’s Day but, according to the Bible, Father’s Day should be every day because our Father in Heaven wants us to honor him, love him, and obey him every day. He wants us to be sons and daughters to him by looking to Yeshua as our example.

According to Scripture, Yeshua commanded his disciples to follow him, but he did not want them to look solely to him; rather he wanted them to look beyond him to his Father in Heaven as did he:

*“Then Yeshua answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.” (John 5:19)*

*“Then Yeshua said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.” (John 8:28)*

*“For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.” (John 12:49)*

*“You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28)*

Did you notice what Yeshua said in John 14:28? *“My Father is greater than I.”* And did Yeshua tell his disciples to pray to him? No, He did not! He gave them words to pray to his and our Father in Heaven and said: *“In this manner, therefore, pray:”*

So, let us now pray his words in Matthew 6:9-13 as they are projected on the screen:

*“Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our [sins,] As we forgive [those who sin against us]. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*

Okay, we have covered a lot of ground regarding fatherhood, but there is one area left to discuss, which is our own fatherhood. Father’s Day in America emphasizes children honoring their fathers which the Bible does as well. However, the Bible equally emphasizes the responsibility of fathers to their children, which is not a theme of the secular Father’s Day.

According to the Bible, being a father to our children is serious business as we have seen from the attention our Father in Heaven gives to us. I had my two sons before I was a believer, and I remember distinctly what my attitude was about it. I saw other new fathers (also unbelievers) agonizing over the responsibility of their fatherhood, thinking it was daunting. I scorned their concern because I considered fatherhood to be natural and requiring only five things—(1) providing for my children; (2) protecting my children; (3) spending time with my children; (4) teaching my children; and (5) respecting my children as people. When I think back on it, although I was an unbeliever and knew virtually nothing about the Bible, I was spot on! I did not know it then (but I do now), that my wisdom about bringing up children did not come from my intelligence, but from God imparting it to me. What I also did not know at the time (but do now) was that the five things I intuitively knew were required for bringing up children amounted to biblical love. Yes, God knew me before I knew him, and He was a father to me before I even knew He existed.

Although there are many Scriptures about fatherhood, let me unpack the ones that speak to the five essential attributes of fatherhood of which I spoke. The first of them is being a provider for our children; in 1 Timothy 5:8 we read:

*“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*



God provides for us, and he expects us to do the same for our children. We read in Philippians 4:19:

*“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Messiah Yeshua.”*

And similarly, Matthew 6:31-33:

*“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”*

The second essential attribute of fatherhood is being a protector of our children. Children are helpless at birth and remain vulnerable even when they grow to teen age. Yeshua prayed protection for his disciples (his children) and said to his Father in John 17:15:

*“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”*

And we also read of God’s protection of us in Psalms 32:7:

*“You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.”*

We too must protect our children from the dangers of the world, for *“the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8).

The third essential attribute of fatherhood is being a spender of time with our children. It is by our spending quality time with them that our children get to know us and absorb our values. We must spend time with our children in the same way as God spends time with us, the ultimate of which is expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:16:

*“For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”*

In that He has made us his Temple and lives within us, He spends time with us all-of-the-time.

The fourth essential attribute of fatherhood is being teachers of our children. Proverbs 22:6 exhorts us to:

*“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

And in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 we read:

*“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”*

We come now to the last essential attribute of fatherhood which is being respecters of our children and treating them as persons. 1 Peter 2:17a in the NIV commands us to

*“Show proper respect to everyone:”*

We normally think of children respecting parents and not vice versa, but “*Yeshua* said:

*“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 19:14)

When I had my first son David, something in me (I know now it was God) told me that it was important to respect my son as having as much human value as if he were an adult. I followed that principle with David and then with my other son Brian, and the way that I did it was to not talk down to them with baby talk. I respected their prerogatives and desires and did not take undue advantage of them with my greater strength and size. I reasoned with them as though they were adults even when I was certain that they did not fully understand and, when I bought them a gift that had an adult counterpart (such as a hand tool), I bought them the adult version instead of the child’s toy version of lesser quality. Later, as they grew to adulthood, I let my children know what my expectations of them were at every stage of their development, and I held them accountable. I always listened carefully to what they had to say, and I responded to them in an adult way even when what they had to say was childish. And when they grew large enough, they had a seat at the dinner table and were encouraged to contribute to conversations, even among guests.

That concludes my message on “Fatherhood” so, at this time, let us pray for the fathers and children that are here in this room.

—CJB

## Go and Make Disciples

*Delivered May 5, 2018*

In Matthew 28:16-20 we read:

*“So the eleven talmidim (i.e. disciples) went to the hill in the Galil where Yeshua had told them to go. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some hesitated. Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim (i.e. disciples), immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age.””*

This was a commandment that Yeshua gave to his 12 disciples and, if we are his disciples, then the commandment is for us as well. But are we disciples of Yeshua in its full sense? To be sure, we must first know what being a disciple means. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines “disciple” in several ways:

- (a) *“...one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another.”*
- (b) *“...one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ’s followers according to the Gospel accounts.”*
- (c) *“...a convinced adherent of a school or individual (e.g. a disciple of Freud).*

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines “disciple” similarly:

- (d) *“...a person who believes in the ideas of a leader, especially a religious or political one, and tries to live according to those ideas.”*

Are we truly disciples of Yeshua according to these definitions? I am confident that most of us are in that we believe who Yeshua is and what he stands for—that he is the Messiah, the son of God, and that by receiving his sacrifice to atone for our sins and by following him we are saved. But Yeshua commanded his First Century disciples to make other disciples so, we who say we who are his disciples cannot be so in fulness if we do not buy into that as well. That is what I want to talk to you about today and to ask this question: Are we engaged in making disciples for Yeshua?

Many of us here came from churches that emphasized personal salvation over Kingdom responsibilities. Then, when we came into Messianic Judaism, we found out that God has work for us to do that requires both our time and our knowledge. We may have come partially disciplined already but, once here, discovered that there was more to learn and to do.

As disciples of Yeshua, charged with making disciples of others, where should we begin? The answer is, we should begin with ourselves. We should take a survey of where we are both spiritually and knowledge-wise and seek to advance to where God wants us to be. And since no one sees himself as others see him, a good way for us to do that is to ask a congregational leader or other spiritually mature person to evaluate us and be our discipler for a season.

I have found that a good plan for a discipleship program is to combine what is written in two books—one Messianic Jewish, and the other Christian. The Messianic Jewish book is Dan Juster’s book “Growing to Maturity.” Even if we have already read it we should go through it again with a personal discipler because reading alone or discussing issues in a class is not the same as working with a person one-on-one. It is entirely possible to read “Growing to Maturity” cover-to-cover and still find the need to bring our life into alignment with some of its biblical and Jewish content. I say “Jewish” content because if God has drawn us to a Messianic Jewish congregation, He has brought us to a place where we are (or will be) called to make disciples of Jewish people; it is one of the unique purposes of Messianic Judaism and of those called to it.

The second book that I recommend is “Self-Confrontation,” developed by John Broger and published by the Biblical Counseling Foundation. Its subtitle is “*A manual for in-depth discipleship based on the Old and New Testaments as the only authoritative rule of faith and conduct.*” It is the first book I use to train Biblical Counselors because biblical counseling is similar to discipleship, the only difference being that in counseling, the one being counselled is seeking help with a stated problem. Permit me to read some of the subjects covered in the book from its table of contents:

- Man’s way and God’s way
- The biblical dynamics of change
- Dealing with self
- Anger and bitterness
- Learning how to love your neighbor
- The Marriage relationship
- Parent child relationships
- Depression
- Fear and worry
- Life-dominating sins
- God’s standards for life

Although we can disciple others while still struggling with some of these issues ourselves, God wants us to be fully discipled “disciplers” for our own sakes and for the sakes of those we are seeing to serve.

The first place that God wants us to make disciples is in our own homes, with our own spouses and children. They may already be “saved” by having given themselves substantially to Yeshua, but they may not yet be fully where God wants them to be. Regarding our children, Proverbs 22:6 comes to mind:

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

and Deuteronomy 6:6-7:

*“These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*

As for our spouses, husbands are biblically charged with discipling their wives, and wives are charged with submitting to their husbands. Ephesians 5:22-33 says:

*“Wives should submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord; because the husband is head of the wife, just as the Messiah, as head of the Messianic Community, is himself the one who keeps the body safe. Just as the Messianic Community submits to the Messiah, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*

We should also take note of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35; even though its literal application seems somewhat out of date; it reads:

*“As in all the congregations of God’s people, let the wives remain silent when the congregation meets; they are certainly not permitted to speak out. Rather, let them remain subordinate, as also the Torah says; and if there is something they want to know, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak out in a congregational meeting.”*

These Scriptures speak of husbands discipling their wives which is the expected and preferred situation, but there are exceptions where the wife is spiritually and educationally ahead of her husband and by seeking to disciple him, she is fulfilling her role as his Genesis 2:18 helper:

*“ADONAI, God, said, “It isn’t good that the person should be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him.””*

Once we have seen to the discipleship of our own families, it is time for us to “...go and make people from all nations into disciples...” (Matthew 28:19). But just as discipling our own family comes before discipling others, discipling those in our own communities comes before discipling those in other communities. The communities I mean that are ours are our congregational community and the wider Jewish community in our locality.

We are entering a new phase in our congregational life where God is moving us toward taking our place as part of (and in faith as a leader of) the wider Jewish community. Surprising, but we know that it is destined to be because Romans 11:25-26 tells us:

*“It is that stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Isra’el, until the Gentile world enters in its fullness; and that it is in this way that all Isra’el will be saved. As the Tanakh says, “Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer; he will turn away ungodliness from Ya’akov...”*

We must be prepared, and that means that those of us who are already adequately disciplined must help others in our midst to become disciplined. Once we become disciplined to the level where we can make disciples on our own, God will give us favor to impact the wider Jewish community as never before.

Now there is an interesting aspect to making Jewish disciples that is not quite the same as making Gentile disciples. Making Jewish disciples involves not only bringing Jewish people to know and receive Yeshua, it also involves training them to make disciples of other Jews in a way that the Exodus 19:6 commandment for Israel to be “*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” can be fulfilled.

Making Jewish disciples of Yeshua is especially difficult because we Jews have been brought up believing that a Jew ceases to be a Jew or that he or she is a traitor to Judaism if he or she comes to believe in Yeshua. One can therefore imagine the family and community pressure that is brought to bear on a Jew to not believe. In reaction to Messianic Jews’ and Gentiles’ attempts to minister Yeshua to Jewish individuals, the Jewish community has, over time, developed and published specific objections to Yeshua to try to show that he is not who the New Testament says he is. In his five-volume treatise entitled “Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus,” Dr. Michael Brown employs the *Tanakh* and other Jewish sources to refute the most prominent of them, as well as the traditional Jewish belief that there is a binding, authoritative oral law (*Mishnah*) that is traceable back to Moses. I encourage all of us, as part of our discipleship training, to be schooled in how to answer the Jewish objections that we are most likely to encounter. This message is not the place to teach it, but I will give you some examples of what I mean.

Suppose a knowledgeable Jewish man to whom we are ministering claims that there is an inconsistency between the New Testament passages we showed him that describe God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Deuteronomy 6:4 that clearly states that God is “one,” and he challenges us with the question: “How can God be three and one at the same time?” Would our best response be “I don’t know, I have to ask my rabbi!”?

Suppose we show him from New Testament Scriptures that Yeshua was born of a Virgin and then try to justify it with Isaiah 7:14 which, in the New King James Version, states:

*“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” [God with us]?*

If we do, he is likely to say “Gotcha!” and demonstrate to us that the Hebrew word in Isaiah that is translated “virgin” is **הַעַלְמָה** (*ha-almah*) which literally means “the young woman”—not “virgin.” What would we say to him? Should we have used that verse in the first place? This is the kind of training that we should have before we venture out to minister Yeshua to the wider Jewish community.

So, let us now say that our discipleship includes Jewish apologetics and we are convicted that we should “go and make disciples” in the Jewish community. Where can we go where there will be Jewish people to whom to minister? Well, whether we are Jewish or not Jewish, the first and most logical places are where we normally are, such as at our places of work, at stores where we normally shop, or places we normally frequent for hobby interests or recreation. Jewish people are at those places for the same reasons as we, but how can we initiate conversations? Well, here is one approach that I would NOT recommend:

“Excuse me sir (or madam), you look Jewish, so I would like to tell you that Jesus loves you!”

You will surely start a conversation with that approach, but one that will likely end quickly with the response: “Get out of here before I call a cop!” Or you could wimp out and, instead of engaging persons in conversation, offer Jews-for-Jesus tracts to everyone you see. That is an historical approach that has sometimes borne fruit, but it has also contributed to considerable litter and its rate of return has understandably been low. No, I am afraid that you will have to be patient and alert for opportunities in which the Holy Spirit paves the way for you.

Perhaps one or two of my personal encounters will help. On one occasion, I was insistent that a product I was purchasing contain no pork. The store clerk asked me: “Why are you concerned about it?” I responded, “Because I am a Messianic Jew and we Jews do not eat pork.” He said, “What’s a Messianic Jew?” And we were off and running. Notice that I said that I was a Messianic Jew and not just a Jew because, had I merely said that I was a Jew, the response would no doubt have simply been: “Oh, I understand.”

On another occasion, I was walking on a street in Wheaton, and a Jewish man overtook me to inform me that I had lost my *yarmulke* (*kippah* / head covering). He noticed that I was wearing *tzitzit* (fringes) but that there was nothing covering my head. I could have merely said: “Thank you for telling me,” but I saw the opportunity to engage him, and said something to the effect of: “Thank you. I did not lose my *kippah*. I am a Messianic Jew and am concerned to obey the biblical commandment to wear *tzitzit* but have chosen to not wear a *kippah* in public because I am concerned that I will be mistaken for being Orthodox.” That really perked his interest and we had a lengthy conversation about Messianic Judaism while standing on the sidewalk.

Of course, not all my encounters have been that peaceful. I have memories years ago of nearly being run over with a car by a man who was furious that I had set up a table with Messianic Jewish literature outside of Katz’s Kosher Market. in Rockville. I got his license tag number and reported the incident to the police along with my list of witnesses to the event. They detained the owner of the car and called me to the police station to identify him as the one who was driving. He was visibly shaken at the prospect of going to jail, and when the police asked me if I wanted to prosecute, I saw my opportunity. I said that I would not prosecute if the man would allow me ten minutes to tell him why I was at Katz’s market handing out Messianic Jewish literature. The man took me up on it, and we parted shaking hands—he more educated than before.

Well, I must stop now because my time is about up. When I was preparing this message, it was hard for me to stop because the subject is so interesting and the possible ways of both ministering Yeshua and getting into trouble for doing it are so vast. We will be offering some *Bet Midrash* sessions on “Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus,” partially using Dr. Michael Brown’s book as a resource. I recommend that as many of us as possible attend.

—CJB

## Going Out to Serve Others

*Delivered March 14, 2009*

Loving our neighbor means being involved with our neighbor and seeking to serve our neighbor's needs. We have already embarked on some components of this vision such as providing Shabbat education and providing training for biblical counselors. Also, the initiative I introduced several weeks ago—for some of us to become trained and certified in trauma stress ministry so that we can be dispatched, when needed, to serve others.

Yeshua said to His disciples:

*“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15).*

Yeshua did not tell his disciples to establish Messianic synagogues and invite the world to come in to hear the gospel. That would have been easier on his disciples, but Yeshua no doubt knew that those who were invited would not come.

Consider the parable he told His disciples that is in Luke 14:16-24:

*“A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’”*

What happens in this parable is that those who are offered the blessing are preoccupied with other things and do not come, so the invitation extended to them is ineffective. As we read on, the servant reports these responses to his master the host, who then instructs the servant:

*“ ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. ‘For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”*

In the end, those who ended up with the blessing were not those who were known and were therefore invited. They were those who were not known and were physically brought in by servants who went out into the highways and byways to get them and bring them in. That, I believe, is a lesson for us. We may know that we have blessings to offer, but merely announcing or advertising them to those whom we already know is not sufficient because many of those to whom the invitation is given will give excuses for why they will not or cannot come—just as in the parable. We must do more than extend invitations; we have to go out of our congregational building and out of our homes to show the outside world what God (and we who represent God) have to offer.



Simple you say? Then why haven't we been doing it? Well, perhaps we haven't thought of it. But you know, I do not think that is it. Venturing outside of our congregation to serve a wider community is uncomfortable, sometimes scary, and takes effort and commitment. Perhaps we have put limits on ourselves as to how much inconvenience and discomfort we are willing to endure, and that explains why we are not more creative and proactive in our outreach. I could be wrong about that, but I am raising a serious question that only each of us can answer for himself. I believe that not until we escape our physical bounds and represent God by serving our neighbors, will our congregation achieve its full destiny.

Outreach ought not to be thought of as only preaching the gospel. In that regard I have always been impressed by James 2:15-16 that says:

*“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?”*

So, when I suggest building the Kingdom and our congregation through outreach, I am not primarily talking about preaching, but rather about meeting needs in our surrounding community of Jews, Hispanics, African Americans, atheists, addicts, the sick, the needy, the imprisoned, the orphaned—everywhere where there are people with needs we can help meet. We should look first for opportunities to serve in our local Jewish community, but any service we do for anyone is Jewish outreach because we are doing it as part of our Messianic Jewish calling to be a light to the nations. Of course, whenever we have opportunities to preach the Gospel of Yeshua we should do it, but I am banking on there being more opportunities to preach as we become fully involved in serving our neighbors.

I doubt that those hearing this message disagree, so that only leaves how to accomplish it. I do not have the answer for us, but each of us has the answer because God has already put in our hearts how each of us should serve our neighbors; we only need to discover it and proceed to do it. No congregation develops exciting, energetic, and lasting outreaches as a result of programs dreamed up by its pastors or elders. Outreaches with power and survivability result from each congregant sensing God's calling, re-prioritizing his available time, coming to terms with the need for him to endure a certain amount of inconvenience and discomfort, calling upon others of like mind to join him, and then sallying forth to do God's will.

—NKJ

## **"I Can't Take It Anymore!"**

*Delivered April 18, 2009*

How many of us have, at one time or another said or thought: "I can't take it anymore?" Such a statement is usually made during a time of pain, frustration, depression, or despair, and eventually the event or the feeling that triggered it resolves itself and we move on. But what does not move on is that, in that moment of verbal abandon we contradicted God's Word and have probably not repented. What do I mean by that? How did we contradict God's Word? We contradicted Philippians 4:13 which says:

*"I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me."*

By saying "I can't take it anymore," we are, in effect, saying: "I cannot do all things through Messiah who strengthens me," so we are contradicting God.

Well, you say, in Philippians, Paul is talking about his own life and you are taking the Scripture out of context. Okay, let us look at the context and its intended application. The context begins with verse 9 in Philippians 4 and continues:

*"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me."*

Did verse 9 have its intended impact? Paul is telling us:

*"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."*

It is only after he says this that he tells us:

*"I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me."*

Paul says something else that bears on this when he says in Romans 8:37:

*"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."*

Saying "I can't take it anymore," even in a moment of frustration, is the same as saying "I have been conquered, and Messiah's love for me has failed." Make no mistake. Saying and even momentarily believing: "I can't take it anymore" is sin because we are contradicting the Word of God. Worse, it is usually unrepentant sin because we typically move on without realizing it is sin, and each time we encounter a similar adverse situation it becomes easier and easier to repeat the sin.

Now this particular sin of confessing defeat has consequences to us and to those around us. When we utter words of defeat, we are usually angry, distraught, frustrated, depressed, or all of that, and the event that triggered those emotions may have been severe or it may have been building. Either way, speaking those words says to ourselves and to God, I have a right to flip out or check out.

We have recently experienced a tragedy where the words "I can't take it anymore" were used. The awful act that occurred is exceedingly rare, but violence that accompanies sinful confessions of desperation are not rare; they show themselves through husbands assaulting wives, wives assaulting husbands, parents abusing children, and depressed individuals attempting or at least contemplating suicide. No one has to teach us the unbiblical nature of these things; we all know them.

We like to think that communities of believers are exempt from such occurrences, and in some congregational communities there is social pressure to hide problems from one another and from the congregation's leaders. People spend their time at their synagogue or church with smiles on their faces because it is expected of them; it would be a bad witness, you know, to not look happy—to not look joyful. And the irony of it is that those who are putting on a false face think they are the only ones doing it, and they wish they could be as happy and care-free as everyone else around them who is smiling. It is a deception that (I think) is less prevalent in synagogues, Messianic included—possibly because Jewish history and the Jewish experience has encountered so much tragedy that admitting to negative feelings and emotions seems more acceptable to us.

But they are not the feelings and emotions that are the problem. It is not unbiblical to tell the truth about how we feel, including when we feel bad. What is sinful and harmful is concluding from our emotions and feelings, anything that contradicts Scripture and gives power to a lie by speaking it and acting on it. So, if we have a bad headache, we should say so and pray that God relieves it. If we do not get instant relief we could take a Tylenol pill or see a doctor; that's okay also. But let us not say "I can't take it anymore," because WE CAN take it, regardless of how bad it is. God said we can take it when he allowed the Scriptures: "*I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me.*" ([Philippians 4:13](#)) and "*Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*" ([Romans 8:37](#)).

And God also assured us in [1 Corinthians 10:13](#):

*"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."*

Some of us may be confused by why sometimes, seemingly disciplined believers around us do wrong things. Is God's Word faulty? Is Scripture untrustworthy? No, certainly not. People are faulty—believers included—when they give in to following their feelings instead of the Word of God.

[2 Corinthians 5:7](#) teaches:

*"For we walk by faith, not by sight."*

The nature of having faith is trusting God and taking action on what He says rather than primarily relying on our physical senses (such as our eyesight) to tell us what is true. But eyesight is only one of our physical senses; there are a whole host of feelings that we call emotions, and they are sight as well in that they purport to give us information about the outside world. We are not supposed to ignore them, but we must realize that they can give us false information, whereas God will not. So, if we are emotion-driven in our actions and either do not consult God or ignore his Scriptures when what they tell us seem to conflict with what our emotions tell us, we will soon be in big trouble.

But why are we even tempted to fall prey to our feelings and emotions? Why do our feelings and emotions sometimes have such a strong hold on us that we allow them and not God to lead us? I would like to suggest an answer that we may not like to hear. My answer is that many of us have bought into a false idea of what the life of a believer is supposed to be like. It is true that Messianic Jewish congregations do not preach a gospel of material prosperity or teach that once we become born-again in Yeshua all will be peaches and cream. I am thankful for that, but we also do not adequately prepare our people to expect suffering (which is a biblical promise) so that when suffering does come, we are often shocked, confused, and disillusioned. And, when we are blessed with times of happiness and plenty, we erroneously consider them to be the norm that is due us as believers, so that when times of trial come, we are ill-prepared emotionally to deal with them.

Let me show you some very challenging Scriptures:

*2 Timothy 2:1-3: You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Messiah Yeshua. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Yeshua the Messiah.*

*2 Timothy 3:10-12: But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Messiah Yeshua will suffer persecution.*

This is not the first time that you have seen these Scriptures, and yet the full impact of them has escaped some of us. The first of the two Scriptures promises Timothy that he must endure hardship, and that the things he has heard Paul say he should teach to others. The second Scripture promises all of us who desire to live godly lives that we will suffer persecution as Paul did. I think that many of us shrug that off, thinking or hoping that it was meant only for Timothy and his contemporaries. Among those of us who do not shrug it off, some of us are prepared and even eager for persecution that would make us martyrs, but forget that Ephesians 6:12 says:

*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*

Persecution really does not come from men; it comes from the forces of darkness who seek to work through men who either wittingly or unwittingly allow it. That means it can come from both within

and without the body of believers, and even from those who are very close to us such as members of our nuclear and congregational families. It is not announced as persecution and does not look like classical persecution, but it is persecution, nonetheless. And if the coming against us is relentless, we may forget what Scripture teaches about standing fast and overcoming and may declare in desperation "I can't take it anymore!"

It is not easy, and it is sobering because just before Paul said "... *all who desire to live godly in Messiah Yeshua will suffer persecution,*" (2 Timothy 3:12) he declared elements of his own walk with God that included longsuffering, perseverance, persecutions and afflictions. The good news though, is that Paul also said "... *And out of them all the Lord delivered me.*" (2 Timothy 3:11).

In Ephesians 6:13, Paul instructs us how to come against the persecution of spiritual attacks when he says:

*"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*

It is very comforting to know that we have a defense against spiritual attacks, but we are still going to receive them and we must endure them until victory comes.

Along similar lines, permit me to share several other Scriptures worthy of our meditating upon:

Romans 8:16-18: *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

John 15:20: *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."*

Mark 8:34-35: *"When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.'"*

Acts 14:21-22: *"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"*

We cannot ignore these Scriptures and think that we are strong. We cannot buy into the notion that a believer's life should be pain free when Scripture promises that it will not be. And when God himself tells us He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able and that with the temptation He will also make a way of escape, who are we to tell him "There is no way of escape," and "I can't take it anymore?"

It is a sin to declare that which God says is so, is not so. We have no doubt heard some flakey things said about positive confession, but there is a place where positive confession is both biblical and required. If the Bible states something as a fact, we are called as believers to believe it, to declare it with our mouths, and to act on it. Not believing it and declaring something different is nothing short of sin so, if we ever find ourselves doing it, we must repent.

And as for the words "I can't take it anymore?" Let them from this day forward be words that our spirits refuse to utter because we trust God's Word and because we commit ourselves into his hands in all things.

—NKJ

## **Jewish Outreach to Christian Churches**

*Delivered March 27, 2010*

My message in February made the point that the *Besorah* (Gospel of Yeshua), explained from a Jewish perspective, is different than the typical Christian emphasis of merely confessing Yeshua as Lord in order to have eternal life. While that is true enough, we have seen that the *Besorah*—the Gospel—is much wider than that, and that its explanation begins all the way back with the fall of Adam and progresses toward Yeshua through each of the covenants that God made with Israel. Israel was chosen to be a nation of priests whose purpose and duty it was to bring knowledge of God to the Gentile nations of the world (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:9). Therefore, the Messianic Jewish emphasis toward the *Besorah* is not only for obtaining personal salvation, but also for hastening the return of Yeshua and fostering our personal and loving relationship with God through the *Ruach HaKodesh*.

Now we know from Scripture that the Jewish people are a key in God’s timetable for Yeshua’s return, for Yeshua declares in Luke 13:35:

*“See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”*

So, helping the Jewish people discover their Messiah and invite his return is very important; yet, like most Messianic Jewish congregations, we do too little toward that end. Let us not beat up on ourselves though. The Jewish people are largely resistant to even considering Yeshua, least of all from us Messianic Jews who have been branded deceivers and traitors to Judaism. So, over the years I, like most congregational leaders, have sought the Lord for how to be more effective and, like most congregational leaders, have been waiting for an answer.

Over the last few months I believe I have received some direction from *HaShem* on this matter, and my urging that we be prepared to share the Gospel in a Jewish way is part of it. But I would now like to tell you something else I believe I received from *HaShem* and, as before, it is something in which we can all participate.

I was reminded of my early years at Beth Messiah in nearby Maryland, and a ministry led principally by Manny Brotman of blessed memory; the ministry was called “Messianic Jewish Movement International,” and one of its key activities was to hold “Sharing Yeshua with the Jewish People” seminars in Christian churches. The idea was that most Christians encounter Jewish people in the normal course of their work and travels, and Jews are not as put off hearing about Jesus from Gentiles as they tend to be when Messianic Jews talk about him. The approach was for the Gentile Christian to be able to intelligently show that Yeshua (Jesus) is the one who is prophesied in the “Jewish Bible.” The seminars reviewed the major Messianic prophecies and also taught about Jewish aversions to certain Christian words and concepts.

Manny went to be with the Lord in 1999, and that is the only reason I can think of that the seminars were discontinued since they were bearing fruit. Individual Christians and whole churches were getting involved in Jewish witness, and Messianic Jews were regularly sought after to provide both tes-

timonies and supplemental teaching for Jewish seekers. Some Jews who accepted Yeshua joined Messianic Jewish congregations, and others joined Christian churches.

There were several things that could have been improved upon in the seminars but, after all, Manny was one of the first (if not the first) to conduct them. Jews for Jesus also spoke at churches to energize them for Jewish witness but, to the best of my knowledge, did not have the same approach and curriculum as Manny.

The seminars were several hours long—even a whole day long—and were very well presented, but they were light on teaching churches the Jewish roots of the Christian faith for their own sakes, and they were light on follow-through for those Jews who responded to the Gospel. It was assumed that Jews who came to know Yeshua as Messiah would join Messianic Jewish congregations and be nurtured there. Also, according to my memory, there was no instruction given to the churches about their responsibility to disciple Jewish persons in their Jewish identities and covenantal responsibilities, should they choose to remain at the church that was instrumental in bringing them to faith. That was not on anyone’s radar at the time, and it was unfortunate because so many of the Jews who came to faith were married to Christians and, for reasons of family harmony, remained within the Church. The result was that many new Jewish believers became “Christianized” and assimilated, never knowing the importance of their Jewish identity.

The thought occurred to me that we still need Christian help in reaching Jews, and that resuming Manny’s approach of offering seminars in churches is still valid. What is more, it can be done by Messianic Jewish congregations that can add the additional training that Manny’s seminars lacked. When the local Tikkun leaders met last week, I presented the idea to them and it was well received. Not only that, but a leader from El Shaddai, who had recently returned from Israel and had attended a meeting of the Tikkun International Board, said that a variation of the idea was suggested there by our *shaliach* Dan Juster who also experienced Manny’s ministry. When I see things come together like that, I suspect that God is behind it.

We have been praying and searching for direction and opportunity for more Jewish outreach, and now this idea has surfaced. Perhaps it is God’s, so I propose we test it. Many of us here are in contact with leaders of area churches and can sound them out about their willingness for some of us—myself included—to visit them and conduct three kinds of seminars.

The first kind would be called “Embracing Our Jewish Connection.” This seminar would teach the church about (1) the history of why the Church and Synagogue went their separate ways; (2) the grafting of their born-again members into the Jewish-owned [Romans 11:16-24](#) olive tree; (3) how the church’s Gentile and Jewish members are citizens in a Commonwealth of Israel; (4) God’s ongoing plan for the Jewish people to be a nation of priests to the nations of the world; (5) why replacement theology is wrong; and (6) how members of the Church ought to relate to the Commandments of God (applied in the New Covenant), that include observing the Sabbath and other appointed times.

The second kind of seminar would be called “Sharing Messiah with the Jewish People.” It would teach about (1) the history of Judaism’s Messianic hope and its connection to key Messianic



prophecies, (2) about how the *Besorot* (the Gospels) are Jewish writings about Jewish matters; (3) a little about the early Jewish believers and their lives in the First Century; (4) about the Roman occupation, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. and the *Bar Kochba* revolt; (5) about the many persecutions of the Jews, and why Jews are often put off by Jesus; (6) Jewish aversion to certain words, symbols, and concepts; and (7) how to respond with love and knowledge to common Jewish objections to Jesus.

The third kind of seminar would be called “Serving Jewish Families within the Christian Church.” It would (1) offer logical reasons for why some Jewish families—particularly mixed marriage families—might choose a Christian church home over a Messianic Jewish congregation; (2) explain the special calling of a Jewish believer to maintain his or her Jewish and Messianic identity; (3) explain the importance of a Jew fulfilling Jewish covenantal responsibilities such as raising his or her children as Jews, maintaining a Jewish home, walking in *Torah*-observance, and embracing priestly service as a member of Israel; and (4) explain why a Christian church with Jewish congregants has an obligation to disciple them into their identity as Jews and not cause them to assimilate.

These subjects need not be taught in the order presented but think of how win-win this can be. Christians become educated about their connection to Israel and their biblical Jewish roots (including aspects of the *Torah*) and they begin to embrace it in ways they have not previously. At the same time, they are educated about Jews both in their midst and in the Jewish community, and they are newly motivated to be an effective witness to Jews for Yeshua. Whatever success these Christians have in their Jewish witness becomes our success as well, as we will have legitimately reached them with the Gospel through our new Christian friends. Through our efforts and with our Christian friends’ new-found knowledge, they will be better able to understand the special needs of their Jewish members, and they will be able to make wise decisions on whether to try to disciple them in their Jewish identity themselves or encourage them to visit a Messianic Jewish congregation. In the process, we as a congregation will develop positive relationships with many churches, become known among them as a Messianic Jewish resource, and acquire new Jewish members who are referred to us.

Now if you think this will be difficult to pull off, believe me it will not be if all of us become active recruiters to the hundreds of churches within driving distance. When we run out of churches with which we are familiar, pick one a week at random and either call or just drop in; if anyone shows an interest, take their name and tell them that your rabbi will call them. As for planning the seminars—leave that to me. You get the churches, and I’ll construct the seminars. Remember though—the success of this will depend on your effort of your effort in contacting churches. So, let us do it!

—NKJ

## The Laying on of Hands in Ministry

*Delivered July 7, 2012*

Two weeks ago, at an after-service prayer time, I asked that only elders lay hands on those for whom they prayed. Several of you questioned me about that and, after praying and studying the Scriptures, I have revised my previous thinking on the matter.

The ministry of “laying on of hands” is biblically “foundational.” The New King James version (slightly “messianized”) translates Hebrews 6:1-2 this way:

*“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Messiah, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”*

In his “Complete Jewish Bible,” David Stern does not use the term “laying on of hands” in this verse as do most other English translators. Instead, he uses the Hebrew word “*s'mikhah*,” which literally means “leaning.” Stern translates Hebrews 6:1-2 this way:

*“Therefore, leaving behind the initial lessons about the Messiah, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of turning from works that lead to death, trusting God, and instruction about washings, *s'mikhah*, the resurrection of the dead and eternal punishment.”*

There are several occurrences in the Bible where hands are laid on individuals by other individuals, and there are several reasons for it. Stern’s choice of the Hebrew word “*s'michah*” here in verse 2 appears to indicate that the kind of “laying on of hands” that is foundational is the kind used in performing ordinations rather than the kind used for other ministry purposes such as for healing. I am inclined to disagree with Stern because I see nothing in the Greek text of Hebrews 6:1-2 that suggests a need to narrow its meaning that way. The operative Greek words are ἐπιθέσεως τε χειρῶν (transliterated *epithéseós te chairo-u*), which literally translates to “assaulting with a hand,” and therefore the Greek words allow for broad meaning and broad application.

When he chose “*s'mikhah*,” Stern was more than likely thinking of Numbers 8:10-11 which he translates:

*“You will present the *L'vi'im* before ADONAI, the people of Isra'el will lay their hands on the *L'vi'im*, and Aharon will offer the *L'vi'im* before ADONAI as a wave offering from the people of Isra'el, so that they may do ADONAI's service.”*

The operative Hebrew words here, וּסְמְכוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת יְפֵיהֶם עַל-הַלְוִיִּם (transliterated *v'samch'u v'ney yisrael et-y'deyhem al ha-l'viyim*), were commanded by God in the context of his giving instructions for ordaining the Levites, and the words literally mean “the house of Israel will lean the hands on the Levites.” Notice that although Aaron is the one who offers the Levites to the Lord, it is not Aaron

who lays hands on them. Hands are laid by the people of Israel themselves, which makes perfect sense since in Exodus 19:6, God declares Israel to be a “kingdom of priests”:

“... ‘and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”

Numbers 8:10-11 is the primary Scripture from which we derive the word “*s’michah*” for ordaining rabbis, elders, *shamashim*, and other spiritual leaders. There are other Scriptures as well in which derivatives of the word “*s’michah*” are associated with ordinations, a prominent one being Numbers 27:22-23, in which Moses ordains Joshua to be his successor:

“Moshe did as ADONAI had ordered him. He took Y’hoshua, put him before El’azar the cohen and the whole community, laid his hands on him, and commissioned him, as ADONAI had said through Moshe.”

Our understanding is that this laying on of hands was accompanied by a partial transfer of the Holy Spirit from Moses to Joshua, because we read in Deuteronomy 34:9:

“Y’hoshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of wisdom, for Moshe had laid his hands on him, and the people of Isra’el heeded him and did what ADONAI had ordered Moshe.”

Derivatives of “*s’michah*” are used in other ways as well, such as laying hands on a *korban*—an animal sacrifice; we find an example of this, in Leviticus 1:4:

וסמך ידו על ראש העלה ונרצה לו לכפר עליו:

*V’samach yado al rosh ha-olah v’nirtzah lo l’chapeir alav.*

“He is to lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.”

This common association of “laying on of hands” with ordination or “*s’michah*,” and my assumption that one must be in authority in order to “lay on hands” for transferring the Spirit, were the reasons why, two weeks ago, I asked that only elders “lay on hands” during prayer. Another reason was that, when I was a new believer, I was taught that “laying on of hands” can be dangerous because an unclean spirit can be transferred in the process. Here is an excerpt from an article I found on the Internet that expresses that teaching:

“A supporter of QR [a well-known minister who was defrocked due to sexual sin] recently suggested that I might want QR to pray for me. My answer is “NO!” I would NOT want QR to pray for me. I am very careful who I ask to pray for me because one of my mentors taught me that with the Laying on of Hands can come the transference of spirits. (See also: Transference of Spirits, Alexander William Ness, 1981, Welch Co). Pastor Ness says: “Few people realize the dangers involved in laying on of hands. There is great danger in having just anyone laying hands on you. I don’t want what is in QR to transfer into me. I don’t want what is in QR to transfer into anyone. Ness observes: “A homosexual evangelist laid hands on people and soon some of his admirers

*had like problems” (Page 120, Ness, 1981). The way to avoid transference of spirits is to be careful with laying on of Hands (Hebrews 6:1, 1Timothy 5:22.). If the fruit of person’s life is suspect, then avoid prayer by him or for him involving laying on of hands. Avoid it.”*

Until this week I had had no occasion to review the correctness of what I was taught back in the late 1970s. Now that I have re-studied the matter, I have come to the conclusion that I was not taught correctly because I can find no teaching or example in the Bible of something bad resulting from the “laying on of hands” in ministry. What is more, in the few books and Internet articles I reviewed that warn against “laying on of hands” during ministry, the warnings seem to be supported by nothing more than anecdotes and what I believe to be an incorrect interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:22 from the King James Version of the Bible:

*“Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.”*

In my opinion, the correct meaning of 1 Timothy 5:22 is more accurately rendered in the Complete Jewish Bible and the New American Standard Bible as referring to ordaining unwisely; in the NASB it reads:

*“Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”*

Despite the many books and articles warning against it, Scripture endorses the laying on of hands by ordinary believers in order to heal those who are sick, in sin, and possibly even carrying demons. This is implied in Yeshua’s words in Mark 16:15-18:

*“Then he said to them, ‘As you go throughout the world, proclaim the Good News to all creation. Whoever trusts and is immersed will be saved; whoever does not trust will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who do trust: in my name they will drive out demons, speak with new tongues, not be injured if they handle snakes or drink poison, and heal the sick by laying hands on them.’”*

Yes, Yeshua expected his disciples (ordinary Jewish men) to lay hands on sick and possibly demonized sinners, and yet he never warns them that there is any danger in doing it.

There is also an occasion in the Book of Acts, where Paul heals a man through the “laying on of hands” and, as a result, many others came and were similarly healed. Here too, there is no mention of any danger to Paul. We read about this in Acts 28:7-9:

*“Nearby were lands belonging to the governor of the island, whose name was Publius. He received us in a friendly manner and put us up for three days. Now it so happened that Publius’ father was lying in bed, sick with fever attacks and dysentery. Sha’ul went in to him, prayed, placed his hands on him and healed him. After this happened, the rest of those on the island who had ailments came and were healed.”*

There are also examples of Yeshua healing people through the “laying on of hands” and, although we understand that Yeshua was not ordinary in the sense that we are, his example is nevertheless instructive:

Mark 6:4-5: *“But Yeshua said to them. ‘The only place people don’t respect a prophet is in his home town, among his own relatives, and in his own house.’ So he could do no miracles there, other than lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.”*

Luke 4:40-41: *“After sunset, all those who had people sick with various diseases brought them to Yeshua, and he put his hands on each one of them and healed them; also demons came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But, rebuking them, he did not permit them to say that they knew he was the Messiah.”*

Notice that in the Luke Scripture, demons came out of many of those upon whom Yeshua laid his hands, and in no case did any of the demons attempt to enter Yeshua.

For completeness, I will mention just a few other occasions in Scripture where hands are laid on others with positive results:

Acts 6:3-6: *“Brothers, choose seven men from among yourselves who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will appoint them to be in charge of this important matter, but we ourselves will give our full attention to praying and to serving the Word.” What they said was agreeable to the whole gathering. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Ruach HaKodesh, Philip, Prochoros, Nikanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas, who was a proselyte from Antioch. They presented these men to the emissaries, who prayed and laid their hands on them.”*

Acts 8:14-17: *“When the emissaries in Yerushalayim heard that Shomron had received the Word of God, they sent them Kefa and Yochanan, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Ruach HaKodesh. For until then he had not come upon any of them; they had only been immersed into the name of the Lord Yeshua. Then, as Kefa and Yochanan placed their hands on them, they received the Ruach HaKodesh.”*

Acts 13:1-3: *“In the Antioch congregation were prophets and teachers—Bar-Nabba, Shim'on (known as “the Black”), Lucius (from Cyrene), Menachem (who had been brought up with Herod the governor) and Sha'ul. One time when they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Ruach HaKodesh said to them, “Set aside for me Bar-Nabba and Sha'ul for the work to which I have called them.” After fasting and praying, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*

And we should not forget how Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh with the laying on of hands:

Genesis 48:10-19: *“Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand*

*on his head.” But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’” And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.”*

In Scripture, the hands (and especially the right hand) are very important for (1) blessing, as in the case of Israel blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, (2) imparting authority, as in the case of Moses ordaining Joshua and also the Israelites ordaining the Levites, (3) healing, as in the case of Yeshua’s disciples (and later Paul) laying hands on the sick, and (4) the Baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit. The one thing these four have in common is that the laying on of hands accomplished a transference of the Holy Spirit from one person to another. In fact, I have been unable to find any occurrence in Scripture of hands being laid on someone for general prayer where there is no expectation of transference of the Holy Spirit.

It seems natural to want to touch a person for whom one is praying—body language (if you will) that conveys affection and identifies the person for whom the prayer is intended. There is nothing wrong with it, but it is not what Scripture means when it speaks of “laying on of hands.” For true “laying on of hands” to occur, there must be an intention to transfer a portion of the Holy Spirit from the one who is anointed to another who is in need. An example of this would be a person who has the gift of healing laying his or her hands on someone who is sick, with the expectation that the person will be healed through the touch. Merely touching someone affectionately while praying to God for healing is not wrong, but it is not what Scripture means by “laying on of hands.”

Touching during ordinary prayer as well as for the “laying on of hands” *are* appropriate to minister healing, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and other Holy Spirit impartations. Ministering deliverance from unclean spirits is, however, in a category of its own and should not be attempted without the knowledge and covering of elders. In all cases of body ministry, the person who is doing the praying and the touching should have the recipient’s permission and also the anointing to perform whatever ministry he or she intends to perform.

So, to summarize, I hereby rescind my words of two weeks ago, and say instead that we *can* lay hands on others during public prayer and Holy Spirit impartation, provided (1) we first ask the others’ permission, (2) we believe that we are anointed for whatever ministry we are offering, and (3) that any touching of another be done with holy propriety and discretion.

—CJB

## Message to College-Bound Students

*Delivered July 3, 2010*

A few weeks ago, I was privileged to deliver a message to a gathering of Christian students and their parents from the graduating class of West Springfield High School. Upon reflection, I came to realize that what I had to say to them is equally crucial for the college-bound and college students here, and there are additional things I want to say as well.

In June of 1957—53 years ago—I sat amidst my Stuyvesant High School graduating class in New York City. My thoughts were of college and of my professional future, and I was blissfully unaware that I was moving along a path that would eventually take me away from believing in God and dramatically affect my values and future life.

My early religious upbringing was influenced by my Orthodox Jewish grandparents, and I received *Bar Mitzvah* at age 13 in a local Orthodox synagogue. My mother was not religiously observant, but she deeply believed in God, and it was mainly through her that I acquired my own early belief in God. But by the time I was looking forward to entering college, I was no longer attending synagogue, and God was not a part of my conscious thoughts as I looked forward to studying science, mathematics, and everything else technical that I could get my hands on. What I did not realize was that I was approaching a point of major decision—a fork in the road of my life where one branch would lead me to return to God and godly values, and the other branch would lead me in the opposite direction. I took the wrong road.

I did not see it coming. There was no one crucial moment when I chose against God. What happened was that, during my early college years, I became enamored of intellectual pursuits and especially the scientific method of determining what was true and what was not. Ever so subtly, I bought into the notion that if a thing could not be seen, could not be felt, could not be tasted, could not be smelled, or could not be measured with a scientific instrument, then it did not exist—and if anyone thought it did, then they—not I—were deceived. This rationalistic view of the world that crept up on me was strengthened by college professors who promoted humanistic philosophies and, as I considered myself way smarter than those who, in their weakness and insecurity (I thought), needed to believe in the fairytale of there being a God, I was soon calling myself an atheist. In telling you this, I am not faulting higher education, college professors, or intellectual pursuits. I am faulting myself for not being sufficiently discerning; it was I who allowed myself to be led astray.

I remained an atheist through my college years, through several years of graduate school, through law school (by then I had changed my professional direction), and well into my law practice. Then, one day in 1976, for no reason that I deserved, God sent a Christian believer to speak to me about God and “Jesus.” I figured that he was one of those weak ones who needed God as a crutch, so I was polite and let him have his say. After all, if he was so needy and limited in his understanding, why should I, the epitome of enlightened intelligence, pull the rug out from under him?

What happened then can only be explained as a miracle of God. As the man was speaking, I became cloaked by a powerful presence that I now know was the *Ruach HaKodesh*—the Holy Spirit. It captured my attention to the degree that I stopped listening to what the man was saying and turned my

attention to what was happening to me. I can only describe it as a tactile force field, and this atheist instantly knew that God was real and present, and that He had sent this Christian man to tell me the truth. It took God a week and a second visitation to convince me that Yeshua was (and is) *Mashiach*, the savior who is prophesied in the *Tanakh* and who is described in the *Kitvey B'rit HaChadashah* (New Testament).

This happened when I was 37 years old, so I had spent the last eighteen years of my life ignorantly denying the existence of God (and by extension the Messiah), and all the while believing myself to be ever so smart. All this because I allowed myself to be wrongly influenced by worldly educators during my college years.

I am telling you this in the hope that you may remember what happened to me and avoid making the same mistake. Some of you young adults will be going to college and some of you may be entering the work force. In either case, you are approaching that same fork in the road as I, where secular worldly influences masquerading as enlightened thought will try to derail your faith. I do not expect that any of you will lose your belief in God totally as I did, because you have been correctly taught and are initially stronger in your faith than was I. Nevertheless, God wants me to tell you that you have the power to stand against influences that will attempt to derail you if you keep to the truths that are in the Word of God and only consider other sources that do not contradict it. In this way, you can take from the world what is good, true, and godly, and reject that which is not.

There are other ways as well that students can be led astray while in college. Whether we remain at home and attend a local college or move away to attend a more distant college, it is, for most of us, the first time that we experience adult freedoms where our comings and goings (as well as our conduct) are not observed and regulated by our parents. It is an exhilarating (and for some a scary) experience, but for all it is conducive to temptations and experimentations that can lead to excesses and to sin.

There are many ways that this can happen, but a leading one is to become drawn into college social life to the extent that we forget the reasons we came to college in the first place. Depending upon the college, late night and every night parties, alcohol, drugs, sex, and numerous pleasures upon which to spend money are often there for the taking, and parents are not there to warn us that they will lead to educational failure and moral ruin. One can even encounter such temptations at Christian colleges (where you would think you would not), but at least there they are officially disapproved of by the school administration (which is good) but are driven underground (which is bad).

I consider the Book of Proverbs to be a college student's most valuable guide for keeping him on a straight path. Proverbs 1:1-7 states:

*“The proverbs of Shlomo the son of David, king of Isra'el, are for learning about wisdom and discipline; for understanding words expressing deep insight; for gaining an intelligently disciplined life, doing what is right, just and fair; for endowing with caution those who don't think and the young person with knowledge and discretion. Someone who is already wise will hear and learn still more; someone who already understands will gain the ability to counsel well; he will understand proverbs, obscure expressions, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of ADONAI is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”* (CJB)



Proverbs announces itself as a tool for gaining and maintaining personal discipline (which is more than half the battle), so having the Book of Proverbs at your side is next best to having God at your side to carry you through the things you will encounter; Proverbs 4:1-23 speaks to you as a father to his children when it says:

*“Listen, children, to a father’s instruction; pay attention, in order to gain insight; for I am giving you good advice; so don’t abandon my teaching. For I too was once a child to my father; and my mother, too, thought of me as her special darling. He too taught me; he said to me, “Let your heart treasure my words; keep my commands, and live; gain wisdom, gain insight; don’t forget or turn from the words I am saying. Don’t abandon [wisdom]; then she will preserve you; love her, and she will protect you. The beginning of wisdom is: get wisdom! And along with all your getting, get insight! Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will bring you honor; she will give your head a garland of grace, bestow on you a crown of glory. Listen, my son, receive what I say, and the years of your life will be many. I’m directing you on the way of wisdom, guiding you in paths of uprightness; when you walk, your step won’t be hindered; and if you run, you won’t stumble. Hold fast to discipline, don’t let it go; guard it, for it is your life.”*

Proverbs 20:1-30 also has much to say directly to students; here are a few examples:

- When you are at a party and the suds begin to flow, remember that: *“Wine is a mocker, strong liquor a rowdy; anyone led astray by it is unwise.”*
- When a professor gives you a lower grade than you think you deserve, remember that: *“Avoiding quarrels brings a person honor; for any fool can explode in anger.”*
- When you don’t feel like getting out of bed to attend an early morning class, remember that: *“A lazy person won’t plow in winter; so at harvest-time, when he looks, there is nothing.”* and also: *“If you love sleep, you will become poor; keep your eyes open, and you’ll have plenty of food.”*
- When you have not studied adequately and are tempted to cheat on an important exam, remember that: *“The character of even a child is known by how he acts, by whether his deeds are pure and right.”* and also: *“Food obtained by fraud may taste good, but later the mouth is full of gravel.”*
- When you have someone’s ear that will listen to you vent idle stories about your neighbor or he has your ear remember that: *“A gossip goes around revealing secrets, so don’t get involved with a talkative person.”*

There is not enough time to say everything I want to about college, but I will go just a bit further.

Proverbs 22:6 instructs us this way:

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

This Scripture sometimes puzzles us because we have seen children who are properly taught go astray. The answer is that, for the outcome to be as promised, the child must not only receive training, but must actually become trained during childhood; his values and patterns of behavior must take hold early in his life or the biblical promise for his later years may not come to pass. Now you

know yourselves better than I, but it seems to me that as you go off to college, all of you have a good start in that many biblical patterns have already been established in your lives—patterns such as:

- Having regular quiet times with the Lord.
- Fellowshiping with other believers.
- Reading Scripture regularly.
- Maintaining respectable conduct with those of the opposite sex.
- Keeping the Sabbath.
- Regularly attending worship services.

I encourage each of you to make a list now of these patterns that are already a part of your life so that when you are in college, you can periodically check yourselves against it and determine if you have slipped back from anything. I can tell you right off that slipping back is easy, and that many students do it. Faced with new demands on their time, new freedoms of choice and new responsibilities for setting priorities, the personal disciplines of prayer, keeping the Sabbath, and attending weekly services are among the first to go. Students have even been known to opt out of spiritual life entirely while in college and to begin to lead a double life—a secular one on campus, and a more spiritual one during visits back home. This is not as likely at a Christian college where there is a biblically supportive culture, but even there you are able to choose what you do with your time and with whom you hang out.

Now I will address a problem that is ironic because it involves an over-doing of what is otherwise good, which is study. Many colleges—particularly the secular technical ones—make little or no allowance for their students to spend time on anything except study. Spiritual life and the time it takes to maintain it are completely off the radar of these schools, as students are pushed to the limits of their academic endurance. My undergraduate college bragged about its policy of admitting more freshmen than it could graduate, and I remember the dean’s orientation speech in which he said with pride and pleasure: “Look to your left, look to your right. By the time of graduation, one of you will not be here.” And it turned out that he was right.

Because I was not a strong believer (and eventually not a believer at all), all that concerned me was making sure that I was not one of those who fell by the wayside. And the pressures to succeed did not end at graduation because there was an ongoing culture of expectation that followed me to my next school, and then the next, and then into my professional life. Many firms and institutions that employ lawyers, doctors, engineers, executives, and the like are notorious for requiring that their young professionals give their entire lives to their work—even to the detriment of their families. It took me too many years to arrive at an answer to this—an answer that should have been obvious to me and now is. It is embodied in these Scriptures:

*Deuteronomy 6:17-19 (NKJ): “You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers, to cast out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has spoken.”*

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJ): *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

1Corinthians 15:58 CJB): *“So, my dear brothers, stand firm and immovable, always doing the Lord’s work as vigorously as you can, knowing that united with the Lord your efforts are not in vain.”*

The answer is to stand firm in God, do what is right and, if necessary, even bear the consequences. The student who is under pressure needs to say “no” to his school, “no” to his employer, and “no” to anyone else who would lead him away from his spiritual responsibilities. Now for a young person with goals set on doing well in college and in future professional life, it is a formidable thing to say “no” to a person or organization that can affect his future. But that is a “cross” that a believing student must bear.

2 Corinthians 6:14 (NKJ) warns us:

*“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*

This Scripture is often applied to marriage, but it also applies to the believing student who chooses to study at a secular institution of higher learning. The Scripture does not prohibit his attending such a school—it prohibits his allowing himself to be yoked into doing what is not pleasing to God. The student can insulate himself from some of this by carefully choosing the school he attends in the first place, but options are sometimes limited. Once in a school, a believing student needs to always keep in mind that he or she belongs first to the Lord, and should try to negotiate around school demands that are inconsistent with doing what is right. Failing that, he or she must stand firm in the Lord.

I want to say one more thing, although there is much more to say. You are a member of this congregation and you will remain so while you are away. Because of that, Hebrews 13:17 applies to you when it says:

*“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*

This is speaking of your congregational elders and, by extension, your *chavurah* leaders with whom you are biblically required to remain accountable to even from across the country. They remain responsible for watching out for your souls, which is for your protection. That is a good thing. Identify an elder, an elder’s wife, or *chavurah* leader with whom you relate well and make arrangements to communicate regularly, sharing your ups and downs, and receiving counsel and prayer. Attending college is a great adventure in which we want no mishaps. My prayer for all of you is that your college years will contribute to your walk with God, and that He will say of you in the years to come: *“Well done good and faithful servant.”* (Matthew 25:23).

—NKJ

## Who We Are and What We Are About

*Delivered May 2, 2015*

We who practice Messianic Judaism are often challenged to explain ourselves—who we are, and what we are about. Questions that may be posed are: “What is Messianic Judaism?” or “What is a Messianic Jew?” Or, if we are a Gentile who worships in a Messianic Jewish congregation, a question to us might be: “How can your religion be Messianic Judaism if you are not a Jew?” Answering these questions is not always simple, and it is my hope is that this message will take us a step forward in being able to respond in a clear and coherent way when the need arises.

Whether we are a Jew or a non-Jew, our explanation of what Messianic Judaism is might be:

*“Messianic Judaism is a New Covenant Judaism that is practiced in a congregational context by Torah-observant Jewish and Gentile followers of Messiah Yeshua. Our inspired Scriptures are the Tanakh (called “the Old Testament” by some), and the Kitvei B’rit Chadashah (the New Testament); we do not consider the writings of Talmud inspired. Scripture teaches that if we repent of our sins, we are forgiven if we accept the vicarious sacrifice of Yeshua (who is Messiah), and today we are able to relate to God through the Ruach Hakodesh (the Holy Spirit) in a more intimate way than would have been possible (for most of us) had we lived during the time of Moses.”*

That was a little wordy, so we may prefer the UMJC’s basic statement:

*“The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) envisions Messianic Judaism as a movement of Jewish congregations and groups committed to Yeshua that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, and renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant.”*

The conversation is not likely to end with one question, and follow-up questions from both Jews and Christians might include:

*“How can you say that you are a Jew if you believe in Jesus? Haven’t you become a Christian?” Or if we are Gentile, the question to us might be: “If you practice Messianic Judaism (or any Judaism for that matter), haven’t you de facto become a Jewish convert?”*

Some questions might be more theological and even accusatory:

*“You say that those in Messianic Judaism believe in Jesus. Why then do you call your religion Judaism and not Christianity?”*

*“If your religious practice is a form of Judaism, surely you must know that the Talmud refers to Yeshua in a disparaging way.”*

*“You say that Messianic Jews are a part of the wider Jewish community. How can you say that, when most of the Jewish world says that they are not?”*

*“What do you mean when you say that you believe in Yeshua but are Torah-observant? In Romans 6:14 (NKJ), Paul says that we are “no longer under law but under grace.”*

I could continue to list the possible questions that we may be asked, but there is not enough time in this message for me to address them all. Permit me, therefore, to present a selective overview of Messianic Judaism in a way that I hope will be helpful.

The first thing on which we should be clear (or at least take a stand) is the difference between being a Jew (Messianic or otherwise) and being a practitioner of Judaism (Messianic or otherwise). Judaism (and there are several variations) can broadly be defined as the religion of the Jews, and a Jew is a person whose inherited identity traces back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Some say that Jewish inheritance must be through the mother, some say through the father, and some say through either. The predominant view within Messianic Judaism is that it is through either. There is also the question of whether a non-Jew can join the Jewish lineage through a process of adoption called conversion. Those who say “yes,” contend that Ruth of the Bible joined Israel through conversion by her utterance to Naomi: “Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God” (Ruth 1:16), followed by the Israelite leaders’ endorsement of her marriage to Boaz (Ruth 4:9-12). The logic of those who hold that view is that, had Ruth remained a Moabitess after she spoke those covenant words, the leaders of Israel could not have agreed to her marrying Boaz because, according to Deuteronomy 23:3(2), Boaz’s and Ruth’s offspring would not have been able to enter the Temple of God for ten generations (see also Nehemiah 13:1).

On the other hand, there are those who say “no” to conversion because they hold that a Jew’s lineage that goes back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has to be physical, and covenant words cannot accomplish that. They also point to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24:

*“Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called. Were you a slave when you were called? Well, don’t let it bother you; although if you can gain your freedom, take advantage of the opportunity. For a person who was a slave when he was called is the Lord’s freedman; likewise, someone who was a free man when he was called is a slave of the Messiah. You were bought at a price, so do not become slaves of other human beings. Brothers, let each one remain with God in the condition in which he was called.”*

And there is also an in-between view of Jewish conversion, which is that conversion, while possible, should only be done in rare and specifically defined cases. Our congregation does not participate in the conversion process but will acknowledge persons as Jewish proselytes if they have received their conversion through a reputable Jewish source.

Now, what about the matter of whether Messianic Judaism is, in reality, Christianity wrapped in a Jewish facade? That describes the Hebrew Christian movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but not the Messianic Jewish movement that arose from it; let me give you some of the history. Spurred by a zeal to “save” Jews through getting them to confess Jesus, Christian Missionary Societies and a few Christian churches began to sponsor Jewish-style worship services (led by Jewish Christians) that met separately and at different times from the churches. The services contained a mixture of Jewish and Christian elements, and their purpose was to create an inviting Jewish

environment (Jewish fly paper if you will) where Jews could be evangelized and later transitioned into a church. These Hebrew Christian leaders had no sense of the biblical importance of a Jew maintaining his or her covenantal Jewish identity, or of a Jew living a *Torah*-observant Jewish life. Hebrew Christianity was, at its inception, nothing more than an evangelistic ploy.

Over time, however, Jews who became believers in Yeshua but remained comfortable with their Jewish life, resisted being assimilated and began to notice things in the Bible that appeared to validate the importance of maintaining Jewish identity. This spawned a competing movement that they called “Messianic Judaism,” and it immediately came into conflict with those who were promoting Hebrew Christianity.

Messianic Judaism grew, developed congregationally, and in 1975 the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America that had previously published “We felt it is our duty to make it clear that we have nothing to do with this so-called ‘Messianic Judaism, in any shape or form ...’” changed its name from the “Hebrew Christian Alliance of America” to the “Messianic Jewish Alliance of America.” And from that point on, practically all Jews in Yeshua-believing Jewish congregations referred to themselves as “Messianic Jews,” and to their religious expression as “Messianic Judaism.”

Messianic Judaism is not a comfortable religion of which to be a part because, whether we are Messianic Jews or Messianic Gentiles, we receive rejection from Jewish quarters and Christian quarters alike. Rejection from traditional Jews because certain events in history have caused them to conclude that Christians are their persecutors; so, in their way of seeing it, Jews who come to believe in Yeshua have gone over to the enemy, and the Gentiles who join them are their accomplices. We also receive rejection from a goodly number of Christians because, throughout history, the Christian Church taught that those whose religious lifestyles were directed toward keeping the Mosaic Law in any manner or to any degree were either backslidden or had never received the grace brought by Yeshua in the first place. These ways of thinking have even gone so far as to cause some parents (both Jewish and non-Jewish) to disown their children for joining Messianic Judaism.

That’s the bad news. The good news is that the bad news gives Messianic Judaism its ministry purpose and unique reason to exist. We believe that Messianic Jews and Gentiles are charged by God with the responsibility of bringing the Good News of Yeshua (including news of the New Covenant) to the Jewish people, and also with helping the Christian Church return to its historic and biblically mandated connection to God’s covenant people Israel. The need for both of these ministries arose because of two wrongful rejections. The majority of the Jewish people rejected their Messiah, and the Christian Church rejected the Jews. One has only to read the Book of Romans to see how out-of-whack with God’s plan for humanity both of these are.

Now I would like to explain what we mean when we say that Messianic Judaism is “a Judaism,” and that our congregations are part of the wider Jewish community. In saying this, we do not mean that we can freely walk in on the events and activities of a Jewish community that does not accept us or want us; to do that would be arrogant. What we mean is that we are part of “God’s” wider Jewish community, which is the kingdom of priests and holy nation about which God spoke to Moses; in [Exodus 19:5-6](#) God said:

*“Now if you will listen to Me and carefully keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although all the earth is Mine, and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation.” These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.*”

When God spoke these words, He did not reveal to Moses that a Messiah would one day come that would cause a split in Judaism. God’s words were for all members of the Kingdom of Israel for all time, and today that means all Jews regardless of their belief in Messiah, and all Gentiles who have been called by God to join them. Indeed, it is the Kingdom of Israel that is the wider Jewish community of which we are legitimately a part.

Sadly, we hear next to nothing from the traditional Jewish community about their being a kingdom of priests with priestly responsibilities, but they and we together are, nevertheless, exactly that. And by the way, if we are a kingdom of priests, to whom are we priests? The answer is in God’s words to Abraham, recorded in [Genesis 22:18](#):

*“And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed My command.”*

So, our priestly responsibility is not only to our Jewish people, but to all the peoples of the world.

Now a word about our being *Torah*-observant. That claim garners us criticism from both the Christian Community and the Jewish Community, so it bears some explanation. First, no one today—not Jews and not Gentiles—can say that they are “*Torah*-obedient” if what they mean by *Torah* is the entire Mosaic Law. During the time of Moses, conditions were such that every commandment of the Law could be obeyed. There was a Tabernacle. There was an altar and an ark in the Tabernacle. There were Levitical *Cohanim* to perform and mediate the required sacrifices. The Spirit of God dwelt in the ark, and the government of Israel, being directly under God, implemented and enforced the Mosaic Law in every particular.

Those are not the conditions that we have today. There is no Tabernacle or Temple. There is no altar or ark. There are no working Levitical *Cohanim* and, even if there were, conducting animal sacrifices for sin would be unauthorized because Yeshua’s sacrifice in the first century replaced our need for them. What is more, if the *Ruach Hakodesh* on earth lives anywhere, he lives in us and not in an ark made of wood; and the secular governments under which we live feel no obligation at all to implement and enforce God’s laws.

So, we cannot be “*Torah*-obedient,” but we can be “*Torah*-observant” which means being knowledgeable of *Torah*, and making appropriate substitutions where needed. All the denominations of traditional Judaism make such substitutionary decisions, and Messianic Judaism does so as well. So why does our being *Torah*-observant get us into trouble with the rest of the Jewish community? It is because the way we seek to keep *Torah* is Jewish, and they contend (albeit wrongly) that we are not. As for many in the Christian Church, it does not matter to them how we choose to observe God’s Law—our mere attempt to do it is enough to cause a goodly number of church leaders to write us off as either backslidden Christians or un-regenerated Jews.

Now this matter of our Messianic Jewish communities being *Torah*-observant requires further discussion because it is not without some controversy among ourselves. To begin with, we are not all Jews in our congregations, we are Gentiles as well. The Jews among us rightly feel an obligation to the *Torah* because the Law that was given through Moses was spoken to Israel and not to the Gentile nations. That notwithstanding, Scriptures make it clear that the Mosaic Law (and indeed the Mosaic Covenant itself) were not only given to the Israelites, but also to the Gentiles who lived among them and were part of that early Jewish nation:

Deuteronomy 29:9(10)-14(15): *“Today you are standing, all of you, before ADONAI your God—your heads, your tribes, your leaders and your officers—all the men of Isra’el, along with your little ones, your wives and your foreigners here with you in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. The purpose is that you should enter into the covenant of ADONAI your God and into his oath which ADONAI your God is making with you today, so that he can establish you today for himself as a people, and so that for you he will be God—as he said to you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Avraham, Yitz’chak and Ya’akov. But I am not making this covenant and this oath only with you. Rather, I am making it both with him who is standing here with us today before ADONAI our God and also with him who is not here with us today.”*

Deuteronomy 31:10-12: *“Moshe gave them these orders: “At the end of every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot in the year of sh’mittah, when all Isra’el have come to appear in the presence of ADONAI at the place he will choose, you are to read this Torah before all Isra’el, so that they can hear it. Assemble the people—the men, the women, the little ones and the foreigners you have in your towns—so that they can hear, learn, fear ADONAI your God and take care to obey all the words of this Torah;”*

The Scriptures I have just read say some important things about to whom the *Torah* applies, and to whom it does not:

1. It applies to all Jews everywhere.
2. It applies to Gentiles who are called by God to be part of a Jewish community.
3. Except for the moral commandments, the *Torah* is not law to Gentiles who are not part of a Jewish Community.

By way of clarification, being called to be part of a Jewish community is more than just attending services. A Gentile who is genuinely called to be part of a Jewish community is also called to take on the lifestyle and covenant obligations of that community.

You may recall that I previously pointed out that, due to our new circumstances, none of us can obey the entire Mosaic Law literally and we therefore have to make substitutions. Well then, how do we decide what substitutions to make? There can only be two ways:

1. We adhere to the traditions of the Jewish communities of which we are a part.
2. We pray and ask the *Ruach Hakodesh* to direct us individually.



There is so much more to say, but we are out of time. If this message has perked your desire to know more about who we are and what we are about as Messianic Jews and Gentiles, please ask me or one of the elders and we will be happy to discuss it with you at length.

—CJB

## Ministry amidst Disaster

*Delivered January 16, 2010*

We are all aware of the awful tragedy that is even now unfolding in Port Au Prince Haiti. Whenever we encounter tragedies such as this, it is natural for us to ask the question “Why?” As Bible believers, we know that the Bible speaks of “natural” disasters and other tragic happenings, and we automatically review in our minds what we know of the Scriptures and are tempted to draw conclusions about the Scriptures’ applicability to the current event.

A few days ago, Reverend Pat Robertson did this while trying to explain the Haiti earthquake disaster, and he has been criticized for it because he said this:

*“Something happened a long time ago in Haiti, and people might not want to talk about it. They were under the heel of the French. You know, Napoleon III, or whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said, we will serve you if you’ll get us free from the French. True story. And so, the devil said, “okay it’s a deal.” Ever since, they have been cursed by one thing after the other.” That island of Hispaniola is one island. It is cut down the middle; on the one side is Haiti on the other is the Dominican Republic,” he said. “Dominican Republic is prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etc. Haiti is in desperate poverty. Same island. They need to have and we need to pray for them a great turning to God and out of this tragedy I’m optimistic something good may come. But right now we are helping the suffering people and the suffering is unimaginable.”*

I am not going to either agree or disagree with Pat Robertson’s application of Scripture to Haiti because God has not revealed anything to me about it. I am, however, willing to say that Robertson is right when he points out that God punishes both nations and individuals who go after other gods; to confirm that, we need only remember the great flood, Sodom and Gomorra, and the words of *Torah* in Deuteronomy 11:16-17:

*“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD’S anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.”*

And also Deuteronomy 30:19:

*“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;”*

And in Psalms 18:4-7 we read:

*“The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came*

*before Him, even to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry.”*

I first heard about Pat Robertson’s statement from a radio personality who was apparently Roman Catholic, and he was criticizing Robertson as having an “Old Testament” mentality; the remark was clearly not respectful of that part of the Bible. I was disturbed by the radio host’s position that God’s punishment of men and nations for sin was necessarily Old Testament and not according to the Gospel of—as he put it—“Christ! If I could have only shouted into my car radio and made him hear Yeshua’s words in [Matthew 24:4-7](#):

*“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.”*

And also Yeshua’s words in [Luke 21:8-11](#):

*“Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and, ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.” Then He said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.”*

And then I would have shouted: “Not only that, Mr. Radio man, listen to what [Revelation 6:12-17](#) and [Revelation 16:15-21](#) have to say!”

*“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!’ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”*

*“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon. Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered*

*before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.”*

So you see, Mr. Radio man, earthquakes are associated with God’s disapproval in the New Testament as well as in the *Tanakh*, and the New Testament’s prediction is that we will blame God for them rather than repent!

Okay, there is that one aspect of this in which I am supporting Pat Robinson’s understanding of Scripture, but that still leaves the problem of his broadcasting it because the public to whom Robertson was speaking had little or no biblical knowledge with which to properly process what he said. So, the result was that it came across as a heartless condemnation of some poor folks who are suffering terribly.

Perhaps what was needed instead was a response such as we find in [Psalms 145:8-9](#):

*“The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.”*

And also in [Zechariah 7:9](#):

*“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother.’”*

It is a lesson to us that in a situation where human need is great, where survival is at stake, where a need for food, shelter, healing, and safety are paramount—that is not the time for us to judge or blame, or theologize, except for one theological principle—“love your neighbor as yourself.”

What we have all seen on television in the last two days—the horror of mass deaths and horrendous injuries—the scarcity of food, water, shelter, and medicine, and the interruption of communication and power—are only one side of what is now going on in Haiti. The other side is the heroism of the first and second responders. Some are ordinary people helping their neighbors and sharing what little they have. Some are organized responders—many who are volunteers—deployed from the United States and other nations to help. We need to be proud of them and pray for them.

Part of what we have been seeing on television in the last two days is what I received training for last summer, and again earlier this week, and will again this coming March. The training is in how to serve as a Crisis Care Chaplain in major disasters. All traumatic incidents have things in common—there is a threat to life and property followed by a crisis of human reaction to what has happened. The events in these incidents are abnormal, and some of our responses, while normal for the abnormal events, are sometimes psychologically severe and debilitating and, if they are not dealt with quickly and properly, they can progress to become pathological. Faith in God exercised by a disciplined individual is the strongest defense against becoming a casualty in a critical incident, and therein is the role of the Crisis Care Chaplain. At a disaster site, Police, firefighters, medical personnel,

laborers, and suppliers care for people's property and physical needs, while chaplains serving alongside them care for people's emotional and spiritual needs. If you want to get a snapshot of what a Crisis Care Chaplain does at a disaster site, think of him as a spiritual first-aider or paramedic. He or she helps to spiritually and emotionally stabilize victims who are in grief and shock due to emotional and physical trauma. In smaller scale critical incidents, the chaplain serves as a specialist in crisis intervention, sometimes assisting pastors and other care givers over an extended period of time.

There are different kinds of chaplains, and each has its unique characteristics. Chaplains serve in the military, in hospitals, in prisons, in police and fire departments, in private organizations, and on disaster response teams. Seven of us have been receiving training to serve as volunteer chaplains at the Prince William County Detention Center and will begin serving there this February 15.

Israel is called to be a light to others, and one way of showing our light is by serving our community (both its Jewish and non-Jewish components) in a way that Yeshua receives the glory. It is also a way to share ministry with Christian churches and organizations that have preceded the Messianic Jewish world in mobilizing for this kind of service.

Prison Chaplaincy and Crisis Care Chaplaincy are similar in that normally neither require their chaplains to have gone to seminary or be ordained. Also, the work of these chaplains can be performed by both men and women. There is an aspect of these chaplaincies that is different, however, in that the prison chaplain ministers and teaches solely according to his own beliefs, but the Crisis Care Chaplain serving at the scene of a disaster often cannot because he or she is encountering people who are in crisis and usually in no frame of mind to receive teaching—especially teaching that is contrary to their own religious convictions. In this way, disaster chaplaincy is very different from ministering within a church or synagogue where one can expect those to whom one is ministering to have the same or at least similar religious views. The chaplain at the scene of a disaster has to feel his way, attempt to serve everyone, and sometimes has to minister comfort that is outwardly non-religious. He or she also assists authorities by diverting traumatized persons from interfering with rescue operations and from injuring themselves in dangerous environments.

Understandably, the chaplain is only free to minister religiously if he receives an individual's consent. This kind of service reminds me of [James 2:14-18](#):

*“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*

Crisis Care Chaplaincy is a ministry of compassion and of the kind of works that is referred to by James. In Port Au Prince Haiti today, fellow human beings are naked and destitute of daily food just as stated in James. The priority in the aftermath of this disaster and all disasters is to save lives and give victims “the things which are needed for the body,” just as stated in [James](#).

—NKJ

## Ordination and the Laying On of Hands

*Delivered January 10, 2009*

The doctrine of laying on of hands is referred to as a foundation, in [Hebrews 6:1-3](#):

*“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Messiah, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of immersions, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”*

Laying on of hands is an ancient Jewish practice that is recorded in many places in the *Tanakh*, but if you ask a rabbi about it today you are likely to get a blank stare and a question in response like: “What’s that?” The reason for the is that laying on of hands was part of pre-Temple and Temple Judaism, but it ceased as a normative Jewish practice after the Temple was destroyed and when much of Judaism no longer looked for the power of God in their leaders and in their every-day lives. There have been exceptions, of course, and there have been occasional resurgences of appreciating the power and authority of God being transferrable from person to person but, by and large, it has been forgotten. The reason laying on of hands has had a resurgence in Messianic Judaism is that what we are practicing is, in a sense, an older form of Judaism with—elements of Temple Judaism without the Temple. We even analogize certain sacrifices of Temple Judaism through Messiah Yeshua, God’s sacrificial lamb that He himself provided.

So, to get a historical Jewish perspective, let us look back to the time when the Aaronic priests ministered atonement to Israelites by laying their hands on the head of a penitent’s sacrifice; in [Leviticus 1:1-4](#) we read:

*“Now the LORD called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock. If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.’”*

Also, on *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), the High Priest transferred his own sins to a bull and the sins of Israel to a goat by laying his hands on the head of the goat. We read how this was done in [Leviticus 16:20-22](#):

*“ And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.”*

We see that the goats in the ordinary sacrifices and the *Yom Kippur* sacrifices were set apart for God through the laying on of hands. But the laying on of hands that occurred in the early Scriptures of Judaism were not only to set apart goats, but also to set apart men or to confer blessings as we shall see:

Numbers 8:10: *“So you shall bring the Levites before the LORD, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites;”*

Numbers 27:16-23: *“Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd. And the LORD said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.” So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.”*

And following up in Deuteronomy 34:9 we read:

*“Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.”*

So, first we see the Israelites acting in their capacity as members of a priestly nation, laying hands on the Levites seemingly as a transference of their priesthood to the Levites, and then we see Moses laying hands on Joshua, setting him apart for service and transferring some of his authority to him to lead the nation of Israel. These were examples of how the laying on of hands was used to confer what we today call ordinations.

Then there were cases where hands were laid for the conferring blessings. We are familiar with how Jacob blessed Joseph through Ephraim and Manasseh by laying his hands on them:

Genesis 48:13-20 *“And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger; and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.” But his father*

*refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!' " And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh."*

Notice how central the laying on of the right hand was here, that Joseph tried to correct his father; but Jacob made it plain that the right hand of blessing belonged to Ephraim. So, this was not just symbolic—there was power and blessing in the hands.

We do not see laying on of hands for healing until we get to the Scriptures of the *B'rit Chadashah* where there are many examples. This is probably because, in the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit became universally available:

Matthew 9:27-29: *"When Yeshua departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!' And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Yeshua said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.'"*

Mark 6:4-5: *"But Yeshua said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.' Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them."*

Luke 4:40: *"When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them."*

Luke 13:10-13: *"Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Yeshua saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, 'Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.' And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God."*

Those are examples of Yeshua healing by the laying on of his hands, but that ability was given to his disciples as well, as we see in Mark 16:17-18:

*"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

And here is an example of Paul healing by the laying on of hands in Acts 28:8-9:

*"And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed."*



So far, we have shown that laying on of hands is an ancient Jewish way to minister atonement, to ordain to positions of authority, for imparting blessings, and (in the *b'rit Chadashah*), for healing.

Another reason for the laying on of hands was for the impartation of spiritual gifts and for what has come to be known as the baptism (or immersion) of the Holy Spirit:

Acts 9:17-18: *“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Yeshua, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was immersed.”*

Acts 19:4-6: *“Then Paul said, “John indeed immersed with a mikvah of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Messiah Yeshua.” When they heard this, they were immersed in the name of the Lord Yeshua. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”*

1 Timothy 4:14: *“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”*

2 Timothy 1:6: *“Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”*

Finally, similar to when Moses laid hands on Joshua, the laying on of hands was also used to set people apart for special tasks, as we see in Acts 6:3-6:

*“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”*

Well, that gives us a good idea of the biblical and Jewish background of laying on of hands, so let us bring this up to date regarding what we are doing here today, which is to lay hands on our brother Steve to ordain him as a *shamash* and, on his wife Etta, to anoint her for whatever personal and helping ministry God should send her way.

—NKJ

## Our Need for Women in Ministry

*Delivered August 1, 2015*

Messianic Judaism has a problem that we brought upon ourselves. It is that we have not raised up enough elder-level and *shamashah*-level women in servant ministry to meet the needs of our women, our children, and yes—even our men. Now by using the term “elder-level women” I am not proposing that we ordain women as our governmental overseers, because Scripture clearly precludes that. The New American Standard translation of 1 Timothy 3:2 says:

*“An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money.”*

The word for “overseer” (which we at Ohev Yisrael understand to mean “elder”) is ἐπίσκοπον (*episkopon*), whose literal meaning is “superintendent” or “overseer.” Now, we understand that Scripture often speaks in the masculine for simplicity, and is not “hung up” on being politically correct and having to say “he or she,” or “him or her” in each sentence. Nevertheless, it is too much of a stretch to think that when Paul says “husband of one wife” he also means “wife of one husband.” So, our governing elders and governmental *shamashim* are men.<sup>28</sup> This, by the way, is consistent with Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 that speak of the husband as being the head of his wife, and Genesis 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 11:9 that speak of woman as having been created to be a helper to man.

That notwithstanding, the Messianic Jewish movement has been remiss by not giving sufficient attention or committing sufficient resources to raising up women leaders. The result is (1) that fewer women than men receive seminary level training in leadership, teaching, and counseling, (2) that fewer women than men receive leadership internships, and (3) when we need a woman to minister in an appropriate context or in a situation where a man should not minister, we are often hard-pressed to find one who is trained and available.

Some of our slowness in raising up women leaders is the “chicken and egg” dilemma of not having enough women to train women. But it is also due to an historic misinterpretation of Paul’s writings:

1Corinthians 14:33b-35 *“As in all the congregations of God’s people, let the wives [some translations say “women”] remain silent when the congregation meets; they are certainly not permitted to speak out. Rather, let them remain subordinate, as also the Torah says; and if there is something they want to know, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak out in a congregational meeting.”*

1Timothy 2:11-14 *“Let a woman learn in peace, fully submitted; but I do not permit a woman to teach a man or exercise authority over him; rather, she is to remain at peace. For Adam was formed first, then Havah. Also it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman who, on being deceived, became involved in the transgression.”*

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<sup>28</sup> Phoebe, a woman (Romans 16:1), was a non-governmental *shamashah*.

In these Scriptures, Paul appears to restrict women to a role of total silence in the congregation, thereby forbidding them from any activity (including teaching) which would require public speaking. It would further appear from Paul's comment concerning women not exercising "authority over men," that his reason for requiring women to be silent is related to the presence of men.

The "difficulty" with interpreting Paul literally is two-fold. First, it is out of character for Paul who, in other places in Scripture, shows a high regard for women's abilities in ministry. In Romans 16:1, Paul refers to Phaebe as "*shammash* of Cenchrea," in Romans 16:3, he refers to Priscilla as his "fellow coworker(s) for Messiah Yeshua" and, in Philippians 4:2-3, he refers to Evodia and Syntyche as two women who "have worked hard proclaiming the Good News with me." Clearly, they are not silent roles that these women have played.

The second difficulty is that interpreting Paul literally conflicts with several other Scriptures that show godly women speaking in public and also teaching men. In Acts 1:13-14, both men and women are praying together in the upper room as they await the promised comforter; there is no indication that the women in that room were praying in silently. Also, in explaining the first public occurrence of tongues, in Acts 2:17-18 Peter quotes Joel 3:1(2:28)-2(2:29), in which the prophet says:

*"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. (NKJ)*

The inference here is that women will prophesy and will communicate their prophecies, for what is the value of prophecy if it is not spoken?

A reference to both men and women prophesying in public may also be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:4-5a):

*"Every man who prays or prophesies wearing something down over his head brings shame to his head, but every woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled brings shame to her head..."*

I did not quote that Scripture to discuss head coverings (which is a subject for another day), but rather to demonstrate that women prophesied publicly even in Paul's day. Prophecy is informative, instructive, and often corrective, and therefore its public proclamation constitutes "teaching" to all who hear it.

We also have examples in Scripture of women teaching men—not authoritatively but teaching just the same. In Acts 18:24-26 we read of how Aquila and his wife Priscilla taught the Word of God to Apollos:

*"Meanwhile, a Jewish man named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker with a thorough knowledge of the Tanakh. This man had been informed about the Way of the Lord, and with great spiritual fervor he spoke and taught accurately the facts*

*about Yeshua, but he knew only the immersion of Yochanan. He began to speak out boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the Way of God in fuller detail.*

That was the same Priscilla to whom Paul referred as his “fellow coworker” in Romans 16:3.

Then, in Psalms 68:11(12), there is a reference to women proclaiming news publicly. It is not treated as such by all English translations, but here are some of the ones that do:

The Complete Jewish Bible: “*Adonai gives the command; the women with the good news are a mighty army.*”

The New American Standard: “*The Lord gives the command; The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host.*”

The Holy Bible (The Hebrew Publishing Company New York, 1845): “*The Lord gave (happy) tidings: they are published by the female messengers, a numerous host.*”

The Holy Scriptures (The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1955): “*The Lord giveth the word; the women that proclaim the tidings are a great host.*”

The Writings (The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1982): “*The Lord gives a command; the women who bring the news are a great host.*”

The reference to women in these translations is somewhat hidden, which is probably why several prominent translations do not pick it up. It is due to the Hebrew word הַמְבַשְׂרוֹת (*hamvashrot*), which is a feminine plural word.

Finally, who can deny that when God created woman to be a helper to man (in Genesis 2:18-24), part of her role was to give her husband verbal help? And what is verbal help but a mode of teaching? Well, I have gotten a little academic on you with all of this, but my reason for doing so has been to show you that throughout biblical history the role of women among men has not always been one of silence, and that women leaders are valuable and greatly needed.

As with men, a woman’s first and primary leadership role is within the family, and her first duty of leadership is to her children. Scripture instructs children to honor and obey their parents, and this implies a responsibility for parents to be good role models and leaders of their children:

Exodus 20:12: “*Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which ADONAI your God is giving you.*”

Proverbs 1:8: “*My son, heed the discipline of your father, and do not abandon the teaching of your mother;*”

Ephesians 6:1: “Children, what you should do in union with the Lord is obey your parents, for this is right.”

Colossians 3:20: “Children, obey your parents in everything; for this pleases the Lord.”

But the woman’s responsibility of leadership does not stop with her children; it extends to her husband as well. Now that is a peculiar thing for me to say in view of 1 Corinthians 11:3 that establishes the husband as the head of the wife:

*“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is the Messiah, and the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of the Messiah is God.”*

And also Ephesians 5:22-24:

*“Wives should submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord; because the husband is head of the wife, just as the Messiah, as head of the Messianic Community, is himself the one who keeps the body safe. Just as the Messianic Community submits to the Messiah, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*

Well, look at it this way. I am the Congregational Leader here. If I come to any one of you and ask: “As between you and me, which of us is the leader?” you may be tempted to answer: “You, of course, because you are the congregation’s leader.” But if you come to me with a recommendation for something I have not thought of, or you tell me something that I did not know, or you correct me when I forget something or do something wrong—who is the leader then? Of course, you are!

And it is that way with husbands and wives as well. You may recall an incident that occurred between Moses and Tziporah that is recounted in Exodus 4:24-26:

*“At a lodging-place on the way, ADONAI met Moshe and would have killed him, had not Tziporah taken a flintstone and cut off the foreskin of her son. She threw it at his feet, saying, “What a bloody bridegroom you are for me!” But then, God let Moshe be.”*

Who was the leader in that case? Certainly, it was not Moses!

And let us consider for a moment the implications of Proverbs 31:10-31 that describes a capable wife. We read in the Scripture that she:

- Procures wool and flax.
- Works with her hands.
- Purchases fields, and plants vineyards.
- Manages the family’s business.
- Feeds her family.
- Supervises servants.
- Manufactures clothing.
- Handles money
- Gives to charity
- Speaks wisely
- Instructs

Is this not a very high level of leadership?

Now, a woman's call to leadership is not only within her home but outside the home as well, for Scripture gives her a special and unique leadership role in training younger women:

*Titus 2:3-5: "Likewise, tell the older women to behave the way people leading a holy life should. They shouldn't be slanderers or slaves to excessive drinking. They should teach what is good, thus training the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to take good care of their homes and submit to their husbands. In this way, God's message will not be brought into disgrace."*

In its use of the term "older women," the Scripture does not just mean older in age, but rather more mature in the faith. It is hoped and expected that as one becomes older in age one also matures in the faith, but we know that it is not always the case and, therefore, younger women who are mature can fulfill this role as well. Women training women is a key area in which our communities need mature, spirit-filled, elder-level women. As a man, I am limited in my ability to disciple a woman, and it would be improper for me to attempt to counsel a woman in any degree of depth over an extended period of time. It is not only because of our physical differences, but also because men and women tend to perceive things differently, process information differently, and react to things differently. By the grace and wisdom of God, the ways in which we are different are complementary, which is why God ordained that when a man is properly joined to a wife, the two (in very real ways) become one.

I would be remiss were I to end this message without calling attention to several notable women leaders in the *Tanakh*. There is Aaron's and Moses' sister Miryam the prophet (Exodus 15:20), there is *D'vorah* the prophet and judge of Israel (Judges 4:4-5), there is Queen Esther who literally saved the Jewish people through her intervening leadership (Esther 1:1—10:3), and there is Hulda the prophet (2 Kings 22:14).

To summarize, I have indicated our need to raise up more women in ministry, and I have faith that the Lord will show us how to do it. Women who want to be raised up and equipped should let their desires be known, and the Lord will provide the means. Meanwhile, we will begin, this Fall, to devote one *beit midrash* session each month to a leadership subject. These teachings will, of course, be available to women and men alike. Also, beginning this Fall, we will attempt to organize a beginner's course in biblical counseling, similar to the one we held several years ago. That will also be available to both women and men and, because it has been our general experience that more women than men sign up for counselor training, we want to especially appeal to our men because we need men counselors as well as women counselors.

But getting back to our subject which is raising up women for ministry, a way that you can help us do that (if you are a woman) is to make your own desire for training in ministry be known. If you do, we will discuss it with you, pray with you, and do whatever we can to help you achieve your goal.

Lord, I pray that this message will inspire our women to be emboldened for ministry and seek you for how you would have each of them raised up and equipped to serve.

—CJB

## Parenting our Neighbor

*Delivered November 1, 2014*

We are all aware of Matthew 22:36-40 in which Yeshua was asked:

*“Rabbi, which of the mitzvot in the Torah is the most important?’ He told him, ‘You are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.’ This is the greatest and most important mitzvah. And a second is similar to it, ‘You are to love your neighbor as yourself.’ All of the Torah and the Prophets are dependent on these two mitzvot.”*

We are also aware of Ephesians 4:11-13, which says:

*“Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. Their task is to equip God’s people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, until we all arrive at the unity implied by trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of maturity set by the Messiah’s perfection.”*

The Matthew Scripture commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and the Ephesians Scripture tells us that God gave us shepherds (some translations say “pastors”) to “equip God’s people for the work of service..”

Recently, my eyes were opened as to how these two concepts blend in a way that I had previously not seen. I had considered the Ephesians Scripture as only referring to what we call the “five-fold gift ministries”—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers and, in my several employments as a pastor/teacher, I made clear distinctions as to who in my congregations were the gift-pastors that were permitted to impart spiritually to the other congregants. These I understood to be primarily the elders because 1 Peter 5:1-3 (in the NKJV translation) reads:

*“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Messiah, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;”*

And also Hebrews 13:17 (NKJ):

*“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*

So, I considered elders as being the primary pastors, in some cases assisted by *chavurah* leaders who have a pastoral role but who are not usually ordained pastors themselves. The *shamashim*, by my way of thinking, were off the pastoral chart because Scripture seemed to define their role as ministering to physical needs and not to spiritual needs. I derived this notion from Acts 6:1-4, which reads:

*“Around this time, when the number of talmidim was growing, the Greek-speaking Jews began complaining against those who spoke Hebrew that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called a general meeting of the talmidim and said, ‘It isn’t appropriate that we should neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among yourselves who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will appoint them to be in charge of this important matter, but we ourselves will give our full attention to praying and to serving the Word.’”*

About two months ago, I had an epiphany of the Holy Spirit that my way of thinking about pastoral ministry and responsibility was wrong. I understood that pastoring was essentially parenting, but the Spirit took me further by showing me that parenting within a believing community is not only for the elders but is everyone’s job. I do not only mean parenting by mothers and fathers of their children, but responsible parental-type caring given by every member of the community to every member of the community. And not only parenting of younger members by older members, but the reverse as well. I saw it more clearly when I got away from the ecclesiastical term “pastoring,” and substituted, instead, “parental caring,” understanding that, in this context, “parenting” means assuming responsibility to care for others through godly counsel and prayer. My original way of thinking had made too great a distinction between the pastoral responsibility of the elders and that of the other congregational members.

The Holy Spirit showed me that, from beginning to end, the Bible is replete with examples of parenting (in the broader sense) of persons being responsible for giving care to others and leading in godliness. Even the responsibility of husbands to wives, wives to husbands, brothers to brothers, and even strangers to strangers, may be thought of as a kind of parenting. Man’s first example of humans having responsibility to care for one another was Eve’s responsibility to care for Adam and Adam’s to care for Eve. Regrettably, they failed in their responsibilities, each leading the other into sin and causing us to inherit sin as well.

Skipping ahead in history, we come to “Father Abraham,” called that because he was chosen by God to be the “father of many nations” and, because of that, the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Bible that succeeded him are spiritual parents of all of us. Joseph was responsible for caring for the land of Egypt and for the tribes of his brothers in the midst of a great famine. Moses was responsible for leading Israel out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai, and then caring for the Israelites until his mantle of “parenthood” passed to Joshua. And the ultimate father, our Father in Heaven, father to us and to his begotten son Yeshua. And of course, Yeshua, having no children of his own, parented his disciples and, through them, the whole world. There are others as well; Paul; Peter; too many to name. We call them “fathers of the faith,” and not without reason.

I want now to discuss the particulars of caring for others within the Messianic community, but first, let us see what Scriptures there are, that we may apply. Some of the Scriptures speak specifically of parenting children within the family unit and some of caring for our brother, but with our expanded understanding we should be able to see the relevance of our giving parental care to everyone that God puts in our path to receive it.



Let us look at Scriptures that illustrate God's fatherhood and our sonship:

1 Corinthians 8:6: "...yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we exist; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, through whom were created all things and through whom we have our being."

Exodus 4:22b: "...ADONAI says, "Isra'el is my firstborn son."

Malachi 2:10a: "Don't we all have the same father? Didn't one God create us all?"

Galatians 3:26: "For in union with the Messiah, you are all children of God through this trusting faithfulness;"

John 1:12: "But to as many as did receive him, to those who put their trust in his person and power, he gave the right to become children of God..."

Romans 8:14: "All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons."

John 3:1a: "See what love the Father has lavished on us in letting us be called God's children! For that is what we are.."

Now these next few Scriptures disclose the character of God's fatherhood and the manner in which He fathers us:

Proverbs 3:12b: "...ADONAI corrects those he loves like a father who delights in his son."

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed."

Isaiah 53:4-5: "In fact, it was our diseases he bore, our pains from which he suffered; yet we regarded him as punished, stricken and afflicted by God. But he was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our sins; the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises\* we are healed."

1 Peter 5:6-7: "Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that at the right time he may lift you up. Throw all your anxieties upon him, because he cares about you."

Proverbs 22:6 tells us to:

*"Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it."*

One way to understand this Scripture is that, if we parent our child in the way he (or she) should go, our child will parent his or her children in the way that they should go as well. That is how God the Father fathers us, and it is his expectation that we will do similarly for our children. "But I have no children," you say? Not so! Every one of our neighbors is our adopted child for the purpose of

extending him godly care and training in the way he should go if he is open to it. Here is how Scripture expresses it:

Galatians 6:1-2: “*Brothers, suppose someone is caught doing something wrong. You who have the Spirit should set him right, but in a spirit of humility, keeping an eye on yourselves so that you won’t be tempted too. Bear one another’s burdens—in this way you will be fulfilling the Torah’s true meaning, which the Messiah upholds.*”

And also,

1 Corinthians 1:3-4: “*Praised be God, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, compassionate Father, God of all encouragement and comfort; who encourages us in all our trials, so that we can encourage others in whatever trials they may be undergoing with the encouragement we ourselves have received from God.*”

So, we all need to think of ourselves as parents of an extended family—not only our natural children, but also our neighbor to the extent that our neighbor has a need and is willing for the parenting that we can provide. And how we parent our children and our neighbor needs to mirror how God parents us; we must be led by him through the Holy Spirit. Here are God’s expectations of us:

James 5:16: “*Therefore, openly acknowledge your sins to one another, and pray for each other, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*”

Philippians 2:4: “*...look out for each other’s interests and not just for your own.*”

Galatians 6:1a: “*Brothers, suppose someone is caught doing something wrong. You who have the Spirit should set him right, but in a spirit of humility ..*”

John 15:12: “*This is my command: that you keep on loving each other just as I have loved you.*”

Romans 15:1: “*So we who are strong have a duty to bear the weaknesses of those who are not strong, rather than please ourselves.*”

Galatians 6:10: “*Therefore, as the opportunity arises, let us do what is good to everyone, and especially to the family of those who are trustingly faithful.*”

Romans 12:10: “*Love each other devotedly and with brotherly love; and set examples for each other in showing respect.*”

1 Thessalonians 5:11: “*Therefore, encourage each other, and build each other up—just as you are doing.*”

Those are the ways that we are to emulate God the Father and Yeshua as we seek to care for our neighbor, and God would have our neighbor respond by receiving our care. Proverbs 3:11-12 says to our neighbor:

*“My son, don’t despise ADONAI’s discipline or resent his reproof; for ADONAI corrects those he loves like a father who delights in his son.”*

And:

Proverbs 4:1-2: *“Listen, children, to a father’s instruction; pay attention, in order to gain insight; for I am giving you good advice; so don’t abandon my teaching.”*

This is, of course, predicated on God having instructed us to minister to our neighbor, and our not stepping out on our own.

All of what I have said is independent of any position of leadership we may have within our congregation. However, if we are a leader of any ministry, then our responsibility to care for those associated with our ministry is even greater.

—CJB

## Servant Outreach

*Delivered September 9, 2006*

I do not know if your experience has been the same as mine but, years ago, any time a congregational leader would urge me to participate in outreach, it meant handing out tracts on the street or going door to door in a neighborhood. I never liked doing either of them, and I concluded that outreach just was not my thing.

Yet, Marie and I served at soup kitchens, volunteered at homeless shelters, studied Biblical Counseling to be able to counsel people in need, and our home was known as a place where people were welcome. We also prayed for the people we served yet, in my mind, we weren't doing "outreach" and I felt guilty about it.

One day as I was reading my Bible, I came across these verses in James 2:14-17:

*“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*

Now that resonated with me and gave me comfort because I realized that I was doing the kinds of works the Scriptures were speaking of. Still, my leaders were constantly urging me to do outreach—to pass out leaflets—to preach in parks—to confront strangers on the street. Although I was not happy about it, I dutifully did it because I was aware of Mark 16:15-17, in which Yeshua said to his disciples:

*“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”*

And Yeshua also said to his disciples in Mark 10:6-8:

*“But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

But one day another Scripture came to my attention, Matthew 22:35-39:

*“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Yeshua said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

It was that second commandment that caught my attention. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” For the first time, I connected things and saw that loving my neighbor (which was what I was trying to do) *was* outreach because I was reaching out to do it albeit not in a confronting way. And I remembered that many of the times I served others through physical helps and counseling, the situations enabled me to have conversations in which I was able to share my faith in Yeshua. And in cases where I could not share my faith through words, I did so through my deeds because the people I was serving and others around me knew that I was a believer, and that the service I was giving was given in the name of Yeshua.

So why did it take me so long to see that serving others was outreach? I think because those who taught me viewed outreach only as “in your face” preaching. They made clear categories for things, and outreach was categorized as proclaiming the Gospel (evangelism) and nothing more. In their way of thinking, serving others was not outreach, it was works. Also, praying for others was not considered outreach, it was intercession. Each activity was viewed as separate and distinct, requiring different gifts. Well, I do not think of it that way anymore, as I have come to see that while outreach includes proclaiming the Good News (evangelism), it has many facets and can be conducted in many ways.

Ephesians 4:11-13 teaches us:

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Messiah, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Messiah;”*

Scripture tells us that Philip was an evangelist, and Timothy was told to “do the work of an evangelist. But let us not be like I used to be, thinking that everyone must approach outreach in the same way. Some of us may be gifted in being public and confrontational, while others of us may be specially gifted and motivated in hospitality, in making friends, in visiting the sick, or in collecting clothing for the poor. All these activities qualify as outreach if they are conducted with the expectation that, through them, God will provide opportunities for us to share about Yeshua.

Now let us look at some of the things we must do in order to be effective in personal outreach and let us look at some of the things that keep us from doing it. I hope I have already convinced you that we need not all be pamphleteers, or gifted preachers, but we must be willing to share the Gospel when God presents us with the opportunity. And, while doing it, we must be receptive to the Holy Spirit for his wisdom and direction.

The first thing we must do is be prepared. From the time we get up in the morning, we must be aware that God could call us to his service at any time, and that the time God chooses may not be convenient for us. In fact, it is a good thing to heighten our readiness by speaking to God bright and early in the morning; for example, we might say to him:

*“Father, thank you for this new day and for being my God. I look forward to serving you today in any way that you ask. If there is something you need done or someone you need ministered to,*

*here I am. Send me! Make me alert to the opportunities you put in my path, and help me be tuned to the Holy Spirit for instruction and wisdom, and the boldness to do what you ask of me.”*

This prayer reminds me of Isaiah 50:4 where he describes his morning time with the Lord:

*“The Lord GOD has given Me The tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.”*

The Scriptures give us considerable instruction on how we are to serve others, and I would like to pass some of them along to you:

1. The Scriptures tell us that our service must not only contain good works, but must also be a godly witness:

Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

2. The Scriptures tell us that our service to others must be with the ability that God has given us so that He may have the glory:

1 Peter 4:11: *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Messiah Yeshua, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

3. The Scriptures tell us that bringing the Gospel to Jewish people must be primary but not exclusive:

Romans 1:16: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Messiah, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”*

4. The Scriptures tell us that we must be steadfast in our service and not waiver:

1 Corinthians 15:58: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*

5. The Scriptures remind us that the Lord will be working alongside us as we serve:

Mark 16:20: *“And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”*

6. Scripture encourages us to not only share the Gospel, but to establish loving relationships as well:

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8: “*But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.*”

7. Scripture warns us that serving the Lord will not be easy and will involve personal sacrifice:

Romans 12:1: “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*”

8. The Scriptures tell us that godly service is achieved through humility and sacrifice—not by pursuing greatness.

Matthew 20:26-28: “*... but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*”

9. Finally, Scripture reminds us that under-girding all godly service is love.

Galatians 5:13-14: “*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*”

God wants us to be outreaching people. We do not want a reputation of being annoying by pushing the Gospel on unwilling ears, but rather a reputation of being loving and helpful. It is good to offer a congregational home where there is safety and friendship. A place where one can hear the Gospel of Yeshua preached with clarity and conviction, but not feel coerced to believe or feel rejected if one does not. A place that is Jewish, yet thoroughly New Covenant. A place where Scripture is taught and believed, and where shalom and trust prevail among the *chavurim*. A place where a Jew can find the kind of Jewish experience that warms his heart, and a place that a Gentile can raise his family, serve, and find acceptance as an equal within a Messianic Jewish community.

Be in prayer about what you have heard me say today because outreach of service to others is about the Gospel and is the Gospel. Outreach is natural to a believer because it is part of what a believer is from the inside out. It is fulfilling and exciting and need not be scary. It occurs automatically where there is a willingness to bless others and share one’s faith as the Spirit leads. It is what Yeshua reminded us of—loving our neighbor as our self.

Lord, please receive this message as our prayer to place ourselves and our congregation in your hands. To mold us into an outreaching family to serve both those who are of Israel and those who are of the nations. To give us wisdom and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel of Yeshua to all—“first to the Jew and then to the Greek.”

—NKJ

## Spiritual Warfare

*Delivered May 22, 2010*

You have probably heard the term “spiritual warfare,” but possibly not from a Messianic Jewish pulpit. The likely reason is that knowledge of it comes to us from Christian sources and is therefore not culturally Jewish in the ways it is typically presented or conducted. That notwithstanding it is, in fact, First-Century Jewish, but more important it is useful, powerful, and biblical.

In Mathew 13:39, in explaining his parable of the wheat and tares, Yeshua refers to the Devil as “the enemy.” And in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, we are told that we are in the midst of a spiritual war against all things that are not of God:

*“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Messiah ...”*

To wage this spiritual war, we are given spiritual armor that is described in Ephesians 6:11-18:

*“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...”*

There are several aspects to spiritual warfare, but what is common to all of them is that they involve our protecting ourselves while attacking Satan and his minions (demons whom he rules). This may be through prayers that petition God to act against Satan on our behalf, or through direct action on our part by using authority that God has given us to heal sicknesses in his name and to command demonic spirits to leave and not return. This latter ministry is commonly known as “deliverance.”

Conducting spiritual warfare has facets to it that require preparation for it to be effective. Here is a short list:

- Repentance
- Prayer
- Resistance
- Protection
- Weapons
- Discernment



Most everyone knows about the “Great Commission” to preach the Gospel to the world, but the call to spiritual warfare that is part of it is often overlooked. Let us therefore take a fresh look at what is commonly called the “Great Commission:”

Matthew 9:37—10:1: *“Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.’”*

Luke 9:1-6: *“Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. And He said to them, ‘Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.’ So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.”*

You will notice that this authority was given to the disciples by Yeshua during his lifetime and before the Holy Spirit made his appearance on the *Shavuot* following his death. But Yeshua signaled that the authority would continue when he said (as recorded in John 14:12):

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.”*

And also:

Luke 24:49: *“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”*

Acts 1:8: *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

It is impossible, today, to give you a complete course in spiritual warfare; the most I can do in the time we have is to touch on it and recommend that you study more about it. Theoretically, the authority to command unclean spirits to leave those who are troubled by them is available to all believers. I do not, however, recommend that it be practiced by all believers because, when it is performed unwisely, damage can be done such as is spoken of in Matthew 12:43-45:

*“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first...”*

But there is a kind of deliverance that is perfectly safe and that anyone can perform on himself or herself as needed:

James 4:7 “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

The reason this is safe is that the personal resistance that is needed to cast out (or away) a demon from oneself in the first place is sufficient to keep the demon from returning with others; the spiritual house is not left empty if it is filled with godly resistance. I added “away” because there is a huge argument among theologians as to whether born-again believers can have demons living within them or whether demons can just hang around on the outside causing trouble. To me the question is academic. If a demon is pestering a believer, the believer ought to exercise the resistance called for in James 4:7 and get rid of it.

One last thing. You will hear a lot about spiritual warfare related to binding and loosing unclean spirits (Matthew 16:18-19 and Matthew 18:18) that is not true, so remember this: We do not “bind” spirits, we do not “loose” spirits, and we do not have conversations with spirits. What we have authority to do is to command unclean spirits to leave (Matthew 10:7-8 and Mark 3:14-15; 16:17). All of the talk about binding and loosing unclean spirits comes from faulty biblical exegesis which I could explain if we had more time. All I can hope to accomplish today is to open a new horizon for you on the subject of spiritual warfare and give you a head start in learning. And please! Do not do what many do when they first encounter this subject—become demon-obsessed—seeing them lurking in every corner and being the source of all that goes wrong. Philippians 4:8 exhorts us:

*“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”*

God wants us to spend the bulk of our time, thoughts, and attention on him—not on demons.

I pray that the Holy Spirit who has empowered us to conduct spiritual warfare will also guide us in it.

—NKJ

## **We Were Made to Serve**

*Delivered March 17, 2018*

Have you ever considered why we do many of the things that we do? We go to work in order to receive a salary. We go to school in order to learn so that we can go to work and receive a salary. We play sports for fun and for a sense of achievement. We marry for companionship, status, love, sexual fulfillment, and perhaps to have children. These are all activities that serve our personal desires and needs and for some, almost everything they do is about serving their personal desires and needs. I know what that is like because before the Lord changed me, that was exactly the way I was. More normally though, there is a mixture of motives in the things we do. We give of ourselves and our money cautiously but charitably to worthy causes and, once we are married, we care for and are faithful to our spouse and children as well. For most people, however, the circle of those to whom they give is rather small, often only within their own families.

But then, as most of us here, we met the Lord and sacrificial service immediately became our way of life, right? Not right! For most of us, even our reason for inviting Yeshua into our hearts was initially self-serving. We heard from evangelists that giving ourselves to Yeshua was the way to eternal life and we wanted to be on good terms with the “Man” who was going to be our eternal landlord. We became disciples in a church or a Messianic congregation, gave up part of our Sundays or Sabbaths to worship the Lord, began to tithe, and “little by slowly,” expanded our sphere of service from our nuclear family to our congregational family and, in many of our cases even wider than that.

Now I am going to say something that some of us will not like to hear, which is that too many of us still are not where we need to be in serving each other and serving God.

Let us go back in time and reflect on why God created man in the first place. Scripture does not reveal why so we turn to our infallible source of information Google, and still we do not fully know why. King David wanted to know the answer when he asked God in [Psalms 8:4\(3\)-5\(4\)](#):

*“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place—what are mere mortals, that you concern yourself with them; humans, that you watch over them with such care?”*

As we search for answers to the question of why God made us, we also come across [Acts 17:24-27](#), which says:

*“The God who made the universe and everything in it, and who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in man-made temples; nor is he served by human hands as if he lacked something; since it is he himself who gives life and breath and everything to everyone. From one man he made every nation living on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the limits of their territories and the periods when they would flourish. God did this so that people would look for him and perhaps reach out and find him although in fact, he is not far from each one of us, ..”*

So, God did not make us because he lacked something or because He needed us, so why? He was not short of company, for we read in [Genesis 1:26](#):

*“Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves;”*

We assume that God was referring to his son and the *Ru'ach HaKodesh*, and there were angels and other creatures in heaven as well; so, companionship is not the answer. I will speculate (and remember that this is just speculation) that God created us in order to love us because creativity and love are part of his very nature. We read in Jeremiah 31:2(3):

*“From a distance ADONAI appeared to me, [saying,] “I love you with an everlasting love; this is why in my grace I draw you to me.”*

And we read in 1 John 4:19:

*We ourselves love now because he loved us first.*

And in 1 John 4:8b:

*“...God is love.”*

So, what I am suggesting is that God created us because it is his very nature to create, and God loves us because it is his very nature to love. Had He not created and loved us, perhaps He would have created and loved some other creature. Remember that this is just speculation on my part.

But God did not just create us and set us out there and love us from a distance. He created us in his image and knows and cares for each one of us. He provided quail and manna for the Israelites in the desert, and Philippians 4:19b assures us that today as well:

*“...God will fill every need of yours according to his glorious wealth, in union with the Messiah Yeshua.”*

But don't we call a person who is at our beck and call and provides for our needs a servant? Do we dare think of God as a servant? Well, let us see what Yeshua says about that; in Matthew 20:28 he says:

*“For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve—and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

And in John 13:3-8 we read:

*“Yeshua was aware that the Father had put everything in his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he rose from the table, removed his outer garments and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he poured some water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the talmidim and wipe them off with the towel wrapped around him. He came to Shim'on Kefa, who said to him, ‘Lord! You are washing my feet?’ Yeshua answered him, ‘You don't understand yet what I am doing, but in time you will understand.’ ‘No!’ said Kefa, ‘You will never wash my feet!’ Yeshua answered him, ‘If I don't wash you, you have no share with me.’”*

We are like Kefa. If we do not allow Yeshua who is God to serve us, then we have no share with him. Yes, God via Yeshua and the Holy Spirit is the servant of us all; in [John 3:16](#) we read:

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed.”*

And also in [John 15:13](#):

*“No one has greater love than a person who lays down his life for his friends.”*

Now in my referring to God as our servant, please understand that He is like no other servant. We do not command him—He commands us. And by creating us in his image, he imparted his attribute of servanthood to us and we were therefore made to serve—to serve God, and also our fellow man; we read in [Psalms 2:11](#):

*“Serve ADONAI with fear; rejoice, but with trembling.”*

And as for serving man, we read in [1 Peter 4:10](#):

*“As each one has received some spiritual gift, he should use it to serve others, like good managers of God’s many-sided grace-“*

Let me repeat what I have already said. “We were made to serve—to serve God, and also our fellow man.” I know I am speaking mainly to believers here, but even to believers these words are sometimes a hard pill to swallow because none of us is as yet perfected, and devoting our lives to serving others is quite the opposite of the way that the world and our natural flesh draw us. It is much easier to think (and many of us have been taught) that selfless servanthood is for the very few whom we call “martyrs”—men and women of exceptional spiritual strength that we read about in the Bible, and that give us a glimpse into what the Kingdom of God will be like in the afterlife. But as for the here and now, we think that God cannot possibly expect such exemplary behavior from us.

Well, if that is the way any of here has been thinking, let us stop right now because it is not at all what the Bible teaches. First, regarding our neighbor (i.e. anyone other than ourselves), Yeshua taught his disciples in [Matthew 23:11-12](#):

*The greatest among you must be your servant, for whoever promotes himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be promoted.*

And in [Mark 9:35](#) we read:

*He [Yeshua] sat down, summoned the Twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.*

That is in regard to serving men. In regard to serving God, [Deuteronomy 10:20](#) says:

*“You are to fear ADONAI your God, serve him, cling to him and swear by his name.”*

And Yeshua said to Satan in Luke 4:8:

*“The Tanakh says, ‘Worship ADONAI your God and serve him only.’”*

And Yeshua also said in John 12:26:

*“If someone is serving me, let him follow me; wherever I am, my servant will be there too. My Father will honor anyone who serves me.”*

And in Romans 12:1 we read in the New King James:

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”*

You may recall President John Kennedy’s plea in behalf of our nation when he cried out:

*“Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”*

His exhortation was not, at the time, touted as a biblical plea, but it was because he was calling for a spirit of servanthood on the part of our nation’s citizens. I now exhort all of you, my fellow congregational citizens, members and non-members, young and old:

*“Ask not what your congregation can do for you. Ask what you can do for your congregation.”*

The better statement would be: “Ask not what God and your fellow man can do for you; ask what you can do for God and your fellow man.” except for one thing. It is not improper to ask what God can do for us so long as our willingness to serve God is not dependent on him serving us.

And Yeshua is recorded in Matthew 25:31-40 as saying:

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, accompanied by all the angels, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The ‘sheep’ he will place at his right hand and the ‘goats’ at his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you made me your guest, I needed clothes and you provided them, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the people who have done what God wants will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you our guest, or needing clothes and provide them? When did we see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ The King will say to them, ‘Yes! I tell you that whenever you did these things for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did them for me!’”*

The Scripture's relevance for each of us is that, to the extent to which we successfully serve our fellow man, we serve King Yeshua himself. Similarly, and inescapably, when we fail to serve our fellow man, we fail Yeshua as well.

So, let us not fail our Lord, and let each of us consider how we can serve him or, if we are already serving him, how we can serve him more and with greater effectiveness. First, there is our immediate family. What are we doing to serve each other there? If we are single adults and are living separately from our parents, are we communicating with them and our siblings regularly? Inquiring about their needs? Praying for them and seeking to help them both spiritually and tangibly when we are able? If we are single adults living at home, are we sharing the burdens of the household, studying diligently if we are in school, and working diligently to bring in support if we are not? If we are children, are we obeying our parents and doing our part to help with the household's chores? Obedience is a very high kind of service. If we are a husband or wife, are we caring for and supporting each other? If we are a husband, are we the spiritual leader of our wife? If we are a wife, are we the kind of helper to our husband for which we were made? If we are either and have children, are we bringing our children up in godliness in the way that they should go? All of these are ways of serving God.

Now that is just within our immediate families. Walk out of our front doors and we are in the community. Our communities are broadly of two kinds, which are the secular community and the community of believers, and we are called to serve both as the Lord leads us. Everywhere we look, there are opportunities to serve. At our job, do we do just what is required to justify our salaries, or do we seek to make the jobs of our supervisors and co-workers easier? Are we involved in community affairs? Do we volunteer to serve our community's needs? Are we volunteer police, fire, or crossing guards? Do we serve in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, assisted living homes, prisons or hospitals? Do we run for office or accept community leadership when it is offered?

That is just our secular communities. Everyone here is also part of a faith community. Are we here to serve within our faith community or are we here mainly for what we get from it? Now there no question that we should be receiving from our faith community but, unless we are new believers and still wet behind our spiritual ears, that should not be our primary reason for being here. It should not primarily be because we enjoy the worship or the preachings, although I hope that we do. It should not be primarily to fulfill our need for fellowship and friendship among believers, although I hope that we do. It should not primarily be to receive prayer for ourselves and our families, although I hope that we do. No, if we are receiving in these ways it is because others in our spiritual community are serving us, but our main reason for being here should be to serve others in the community and also to utilize the community's resources to help reach those who are outside and cannot be reached without the help of our brother and sister believers.

What is adequate service within our congregational community will vary from person to person and community to community, but here are some questions to ask ourselves. Do we attend services regularly and arrive on time? It is a fact that when our *Shabbat* service begins, the sanctuary is usually sparsely populated. If you are among those who regularly come late, you should know that those who are here need you, and if you are not here, you are not serving their need.

Do we tithe? Tithing is also a way of serving. As with all congregations, we have significant expenses and our way of meeting our financial needs is through the tithes and offering of our members. Do we attend a mid-week *chavurah*? Our *chavurot* are the vehicles through which we give and receive personal ministry. If we are not our *chavurah*'s leader we may think our presence there is not serving, but it is. Our prayers, fellowship, and contributions to the Bible studies are a significant service to others.

Attending prayer meetings and serving on one of the *ozrim* teams are things that every member should do. If we are not serving in those ways, the burden of fulfilling these important ministries falls upon others who must carry the full load. And of course, there are our outreach ministries such as the prison ministry and counseling ministries and our hospital chaplaincy that we are trying to get off the ground. If you participate in one of these, you are serving others. If you are not, they are opportunities available to you.

Finally, consider whether the Lord wants you to serve using your special gifts. It could be on the praise and worship team, in audio-visual recording and projection, or general leadership roles as a *chavurah* leader, a *shamash*, or an elder.

It is time to end now and let us do so with prayer. Remember, we were made to serve.

—CJB



# **F. Messianic Jewish Leadership**

## **Sermons • Vol 1**



## Concepts and Principles of Spiritual Leadership

*Delivered November 18, 2018*

### 1. Leadership in the Bible

There are several definitions of leadership, but I would like to give you mine; as I see it:

*Leadership is the art of influencing and motivating the actions and behaviors of individuals (and groups of individuals) toward the achievement of defined goals.*

We hear a lot about leadership in Messianic Jewish circles. Why is this? It is because the history of mankind, ever since the Garden of Eden, has been the history of God's attempted leadership of man, and of man's struggle against it and against the human leaders that God put in charge. When you think about it, the Bible is a continuous story of God's leadership of men, applied directly (e.g. God giving Moses the tablets of Law at Mt. Sinai), through the Messiah, through the Holy Spirit, and through the patriarchs, the kings, the prophets, the judges, elders, Apostles, and others. The principle of leadership even carried down to family units as we read about the birthright of firstborn sons being the leaders of their families. Yes, from beginning to end, a significant theme of the Bible is leadership.

I think the Bible would contain fewer pages had men acquiesced to God's leadership but, regrettably, the opposite occurred. God told Adam not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; he did, and the fall of man resulted. God gave men principles of morality by which they were to live; they ignored God's instructions, and the worldwide flood resulted. We read in [Ezekiel 20:8](#):

*"But they [i.e. the Israelites] rebelled against me [i.e. God] and wouldn't listen to me; they did not, each of them, throw away the detestable things that drew their eyes; and they did not abandon the idols of Egypt. Then I said I would pour out my fury on them and spend my anger on them there in the land of Egypt."*

The Israelites resisted God's attempt to lead them in Egypt and perhaps that is why four hundred years of slavery resulted. And when God assigned Moses to lead them out of Egypt, a goodly number of them rebelled against his leadership and the golden calf resulted. Later, God gave the Israelites the *Torah* to which they first agreed, but then disobeyed and, in doing so, violated God's covenant with them. I wonder whether perhaps only half of the Mosaic commandments would have been needed had man's nature been to receive God's leadership without punishments prescribed by the Law.

Centuries then passed, during which God appointed leaders such as Samuel, David, Solomon and others, and all was well—right? Not right! The Israelites consistently fell into sin by disobeying God's commandments, violating their covenant with him so often that God declared the covenant breached and graciously gave them what ([Jeremiah 31:30\(31\)-33\(34\)](#)) tells us is a "new and better covenant based on better promises." This "New Covenant" centered around Messiah Yeshua whom God caused to be sacrificed for forgiveness of our sins, and also around the Holy Spirit who came to connect us to God closer and more relationally than ever before. Finally, because of the New Covenant, God's leadership and the leadership of those he set over us was finally received—right? Not

right again! Yeshua was not recognized as Messiah by the majority of the Jewish establishment of his day. He was disrespected in his hometown, scorned by the Sadducees and Pharisees, and was executed by the Romans with the complicity of the Sanhedrin.

## 2. Styles of Leadership

There are three basic styles of leadership, and all three are represented in Scripture.

### a. Command Leadership

The first style of leadership I will mention is command leadership, best known for its association with the military. It is hierarchal in that the leader gives orders to persons beneath him and receives orders from persons above him. In the military, the orders are expected to be obeyed and there are consequences for not doing so. Matthew 8:5-10 describes this kind of leadership:

*“As Yeshua entered K’far-Nachum, a Roman army officer came up and pleaded for help. “Sir, my orderly is lying at home paralyzed and suffering terribly!” Yeshua said, “I will go and heal him.” But the officer answered, “Sir, I am unfit to have you come into my home. Rather, if you will only give the command, my orderly will recover. For I too am a man under authority. I have soldiers under me, and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes; to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes; to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.” On hearing this Yeshua was amazed and said to the people following him, “Yes! I tell you, I have not found anyone in Isra’el with such trust!”*

In the civilian sector of society, command leadership is the one commonly found in the workplace. There, the commanders are usually referred to as bosses or supervisors, and employees are expected to follow their bosses’ explicit directions. Command leadership works because the commander or boss possesses power over those he or she commands. In the military, the power is threat of court martial if an order is disobeyed. In the workplace, the power is threat of demotion or firing and consequent loss of income. Command leadership is legitimate when it is backed up by legitimate authority. When it is backed up by power only, we call it bullying. In any case, I think it is realistic to say that the command style of leadership is largely coercive, and only works if there is enforcement power behind it.

Notwithstanding the apparent absolute nature of command leadership, it does not exist in democratic and enlightened societies without there also being exceptions and avenues of recourse. In the United States there is a Code of Military Justice that defines command leadership, places limits on its implementation, and provides avenues of appeal with “due process.” Moses regularly exercised command leadership, but there is a notable case where he backed down when facts that were brought to him justified it. We read of it in Leviticus 10:1-20 where we are told that two of Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, sinned against God and died by fire. Then, while Aaron and his remaining sons were in shock and mourning, Moses exercised command leadership by instructing them in a detailed way to do an important sacrifice that God had previously commanded. Moses went away fully expecting them to do it but when he checked back, they had not. We pick up the reading at verse 16:

*He became angry with El'azar and Itamar, the remaining sons of Aharon, and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the area of the sanctuary, since it is especially holy? He gave it to you to take away the guilt of the community, to make atonement for them before ADONAI. Look! Its blood wasn't brought into the sanctuary! You should have eaten it there in the sanctuary, as I ordered.""*

It appears that Aaron and his remaining sons are in big trouble with "Commander Moses," but as we read further, we see that Moses acknowledged the legitimacy of Aaron's and his sons' disobedience, and beginning at [verse 19](#), we read:

*"Aharon answered Moshe, "Even though they offered their sin offering and burnt offering today, things like these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have pleased ADONAI?""*

I am sure that Moses was taken aback by Aaron's reply, but he considered it and in [verse 20](#) we read:

*"On hearing this reply, Moshe was satisfied."*

We do not read that God said anything to the contrary, so we must assume that He was satisfied as well. Command leadership has its place as we have plainly seen, but it is important that it have limitations and recourse.

#### b. [Servant Leadership](#)

The next leadership style I will mention is "servant leadership." Perhaps it should not be termed a "style" of leadership since it is biblically mandated, but it is the one that Yeshua most epitomized: We read in [Mark 10:45](#):

*"For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve- and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

And in [Philippians 2:6-8](#):

*"Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God something to be possessed by force. On the contrary, he emptied himself, in that he took the form of a slave [or servant] by becoming like human beings are. And when he appeared as a human being, he humbled himself still more by becoming obedient even to death- death on a stake as a criminal!"*

Yeshua exercised command leadership on occasion, but he did not call for us to be commanders; he called us to be servants, and he said to his disciples in [Matthew 20:25-27](#):

*"You know that among the Goyim, those who are supposed to rule them become tyrants, and their superiors become dictators. Among you, it must not be like that. On the contrary, whoever among you wants to be a leader must become your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave!"*

In a way, servant leadership is the opposite of command leadership. Whereas, command leadership utilizes the authority of position, servant leadership utilizes the power of humility and most often leads by example. “Power of humility? What is that,” you ask? It is a biblical concept that defies the world’s understanding and ways of doing things. The world understands humility as being nice but weak, whereas humility is actually a God-given virtue that has the power to influence. Yeshua exemplified servant leadership, for we read in 1 Peter 2:21:

*“Indeed, this is what you were called to; because the Messiah too suffered, on your behalf, leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps.”*

The apostle Paul followed in Yeshua’s steps and passed Yeshua’s way of leadership on to his disciples who, in turn, followed in *his* steps; Paul spoke this in his first epistle to the Corinthians when he wrote:

1 Corinthians 11:1: “..try to imitate me, even as I myself try to imitate the Messiah.”

And to the Philippians he wrote in Philippians 4:9:

*“Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and seen me doing; then the God who gives shalom will be with you.”*

Servant leadership is especially powerful when a person who has the authority and platform to command withholds his or her command prerogative, and instead models servanthood by beginning to move in the direction that is the correct one. Those with pure hearts observe the leader and do likewise, and those who would have acted otherwise are often stunned into recognizing their fault and repenting. Be cautious though, because the approach does not work with persons that have impure hearts, so a leader must know with whom he or she is dealing.

### c. Relational Leadership

The third style of leadership is “relational leadership.” Here, the leader does not command but rather suggests, or may not even have to suggest because the follower already knows the leader’s will and wants to comply with both because of their relationship and also because it is right. The quintessential example of relational leadership is the way a father ideally influences his son. Proverbs 22:6 says:

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

Ideally, a son who has been brought up relationally by his father and/or mother conducts himself as he has been taught, both because he knows it is right and also because he loves his father and mother and desires to honor them and please them. This of course presumes two important things. First, that the son loves and respects his parents and second, that which his parents have taught is perceived by their son to be right. If the son’s character is not what it should be, Scripture provides for that as well; in Proverbs 13:24 we read:

*“He who fails to use a stick hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.”*

Relational leadership goes hand-in-hand with servant leadership because the person who leads relationally exhibits the humility and mindset of a servant.

### 3. Standards for Leadership

In the military, leaders are chosen for command and are taught how to be relational and lead by example as a secondary means. In congregations, leaders are chosen who are strongly relational and prone to lead by example—a very different emphasis to meet a very different need.

#### a. Character

Good character is a primary standard for spiritual leadership because congregational members will not want to follow or receive influence from a person whose character is less than exemplary. The Bible is replete with examples of both godly and evil traits but, to begin somewhere, let us take a look at the Bible's character requirements for an elder; 1 Timothy 3:2-7 states:

*“A congregation leader must be above reproach, he must be faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable and able to teach. He must not drink excessively or get into fights; rather, he must be kind and gentle. He must not be a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, having children who obey him with all proper respect; for if a man cannot manage his own household, how will he be able to care for God's Messianic Community? He must not be a new believer, because he might become puffed up with pride and thus fall under the same judgment as did the Adversary. Furthermore, he must be well regarded by outsiders, so that he won't fall into disgrace and into the Adversary's trap.*

Similarly regarding *shamashim*, we read verses 8-12:<sup>29</sup>

*Likewise, the shamashim must be of good character, people whose word can be trusted. They must not give themselves to excessive drinking or be greedy for dishonest gain. They must possess the formerly hidden truth of the faith with a clean conscience. And first, let them be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them be appointed shamashim. Similarly, the wives must be of good character, not gossips, but temperate, faithful in everything. Let the shamashim each be faithful to his wife, managing his children and household well.”*

The Scripture mostly speaks for itself, but the apparent completeness of the list should not be taken to mean that there are no other traits to consider. Also, testing is mentioned only for *shamashim*, but I think wisdom dictates that testing should be applied to elders as well. Ohev Yisrael has interpreted such testing as inviting a *shamash* or elder candidate and his wife (if married) to participate and serve alongside the *shamashim* for a year and then evaluate his eligibility. If all is well after that, he is ordained.

You have no doubt noticed that the 1 Timothy 3:2-12 Scripture is written in a way that seems to say that elders and *shamashim* are men only. Messianic Judaism almost uniformly assumes this as to

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<sup>29</sup> See also, Titus 1:6-9.

elders, but it is controversial as to *shamashot*. My own opinion is that Scripture does provide for *Shamashot*, and I think that Ahavat Yeshua approaches it in the best way. Ahavat Yeshua ordains *shamashot*, but they do not participate with the *shamashim* in matters that are governmental.

b. Biblical and Doctrinal Knowledge

Another standard for leadership is biblical and doctrinal knowledge. Both 1 Timothy and Titus refer to a leader's ability to teach, but Titus emphasizes that the teaching must be sound and "*hold firmly to the trustworthy Message that agrees with the doctrine.*" The distinction between biblical knowledge and doctrinal knowledge is very important, for one can know precisely all the words of the Bible, but not understand aspects of their true meaning. Arguments over what certain words of the Bible mean are common and are what often separate Christian churches and denominations. Thank God that Messianic Judaism is mostly together on the major doctrinal issues, but it is not entirely so even among us.

Biblical Education is recommended for everyone in Messianic Judaism, but it is especially emphasized for leaders. Some years ago, our *shaliach* Dan Juster wrote a paper entitled "Levels of Training: A Guide for Tikkun Congregations," in which he recommends courses that should be taken at various stages of a person's discipleship training. The levels he mentions are (1) Covenant Member, *Shamash 1*: (2) Discipled Servant, *Shamash 2*: (3) Major Service Area Coordinator, *Shamash 3*: (4) Small Group Leader, then (5) Elder and (6) Five-fold Minister.

c. Spiritual Gifts

One cannot lead in spiritual matters without being gifted by God. Ephesians 4:11-16 refers to there being five gift ministries or offices; it reads:

*"Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries [i.e. apostles], some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, until we all arrive at the unity implied by trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of maturity set by the Messiah's perfection."*

Notice that those gifted for one of the five-fold gift offices are to use their gifts to equip others. While one expects a person in the office of prophet to prophesy, he or she is not to neglect equipping others to prophesy. While a person who is gifted as an evangelist is expected to proclaim the Good News himself, he or she is not to neglect equipping others to do similarly. And it is the same for the other gift ministers.

So, the uniqueness of these five offices is equipping, and that is only possible because the Holy Spirit enables the others of us to prophesy, evangelize, shepherd (i.e. pastor) and teach. The apostle is somewhat different though, because the broad oversight of his office is only available to multiply gifted persons.



Scripture also mentions other spiritual gifts apparently given for individual use in serving others. Although leadership is not specifically mentioned, it is logically obvious that all of the gifts are immensely important for leaders at all levels and should be diligently sought through prayer. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 lists them; beginning at verse 4:

*“Now there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. Also there are different ways of serving, but it is the same Lord being served. And there are different modes of working, but it is the same God working them all in everyone. Moreover, to each person is given the particular manifestation of the Spirit that will be for the common good. To one, through the Spirit, is given a word of wisdom; to another, a word of knowledge, in accordance with the same Spirit; to another, faith, by the same Spirit; and to another, gifts of healing, by the one Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, the ability to judge between spirits; to another, the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues; and to yet another, the ability to interpret tongues. One and the same Spirit is at work in all these things, distributing to each person as he chooses.”*

These are commonly known as the “nine gifts of the Spirit,” but there are other gifts as well such as the gift of helps and administration mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28, and we read in Romans 12:6-8:

*“But we have gifts that differ and which are meant to be used according to the grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, use it to the extent of your trust; if it is serving, use it to serve; if you are a teacher, use your gift in teaching; if you are a counselor, use your gift to comfort and exhort; if you are someone who gives, do it simply and generously; if you are in a position of leadership, lead with diligence and zeal; if you are one who does acts of mercy, do them cheerfully.”*

All of these are to be used in serving others, for we read in 1 Peter 4:10:

*“As each one has received some spiritual gift, he should use it to serve others, like good managers of God’s many-sided grace-“*

#### d. Experience

We have heard the saying: “There is no substitute for experience.” Well, yes there is, and that is when the Holy Spirit imparts to us supernaturally. Still, experience is valuable and that is why 1 Timothy refers to managing one’s household and to not being a new believer as prerequisites for eldership. We must not raise a person into leadership prematurely, but what is premature depends on the nature of the proposed leadership. For example, I would have no difficulty appointing an unmarried man or woman to lead worship, but I would not appoint them to counsel a married couple or a person whose children are material to the counseling.

#### e. Holy Living

The requirement that a leader exemplify holy living is as obvious as it is practical. It matters not the nature of or the level of leadership; all leaders must live in a way that is transparent to those he or she serves. We clearly see why that is necessary for leaders such as elders, *shamashim*, *chavurah*

leaders, teachers, and the like, but what about leaders who are not so much in the public's view such as *oneg* captains and administrators? It is necessary to apply the requirement of holy living to them as well because if we do not, an imperceptible spiritual fault will fester that will stain the congregation, and the leaders who allow it will lose the trust of the members.

#### 4. Skills of Leadership

Skills are similar to spiritual gifts in that they add to our ability to function and lead in specified areas. The difference, as I see it, is that gifts are given, whereas skills are acquired (albeit allowed by God). There are some skills that are general and impact leadership of every kind—such things as our ability with language. Leading others requires that we communicate accurately and concisely, so our ability to communicate both verbally and in writing (in English and when needed other languages) is crucial. But language skills are not only for conveying ideas and instructions accurately, they are also crucial for building and maintaining relationships. Not only for saying things accurately, but saying them judiciously, wisely, and with the right timing. In this regard, skill with language overlaps and connects with attributes such as judgment and understanding social amenities. You will receive a very different response if, in your leadership, you say to someone: *“Your idea is plain awful, and I am rejecting it out of hand!”* and you say instead: *“Thank you for your idea. I may use aspects of it on another occasion, but perhaps not now.”*

There are three related skills that I think deserve special mention; they are pastoring, discipling, and counseling. Pastoring is the congregational or community equivalent of parenting in the nuclear family. Parenting is a skill that is partly natural, but one that is intended to be developed through training. The training of mothers and fathers ideally begins in their youth by observing and experiencing their own parents which one hopes were good role models. We know that that is not always the case, and that God often has to provide a work-around. It is astonishing how similar parenting is to pastoring, and anyone who aspires to pastoral leadership must be prepared to parent numbers of people. How many? That depends on the size of the group that one leads. In a small *chavurah* it may be a dozen or less. In a typical congregation, it may be from one hundred to three hundred. In a “megachurch” it may be thousands.

Pastoring in a congregation is as broad and as responsible a function as parenting in one's nuclear family. While the analogy breaks down at some point, pastoring includes loving, teaching, exhorting, praising, scolding, counseling, and disciplining. The level of authority to do these things is not quite the same for each, but it is close enough to use parenting as a model for pastoring.

Not all persons who pastor have the title “pastor.” 1 Peter 5:1-3 exhorts us:

*“Therefore, I urge the congregation leaders among you, as a fellow-leader and witness to the Messiah's sufferings, as well as a sharer in the glory to be revealed: shepherd [pastor] the flock of God that is in your care, exercising oversight not out of constraint, but willingly, as God wants; and not out of a desire for those in your care, but as people who become examples to the flock.”*

The Complete Jewish Bible uses the word “shepherding,” but “shepherding” is the same as “pastoring.” Elders have pastoral responsibilities, but an individual elder may not be pastorally gifted and

must rely on others who are. It is the same with small group or *chavurah* leaders; they may or may not be Ephesians 4 “gift” pastors but still have pastoral responsibilities.

Counseling and discipling are part of pastoring. They are similar in that both assist persons in growing spiritually to be Yeshua-like, but counseling has the added feature in that there exist one or more current problems that need solving. When the counsel needed is brief, congregational leaders and under-shepherds can and should be competent to do it. Sometimes, however, counseling needs exceed a leader’s time availability or competence and require referral to persons called “counselors” who are specially trained in the skill. It therefore behooves every pastoral leader on every level to receive at least some training in counseling and to encourage others who are gifted to receive advanced counselor training and even certification. Now to be clear, the counseling of which I am speaking is “biblical counseling”—the kind that relies on and teaches biblical precepts—not the kind that utilizes secular theories and techniques. When making referrals outside of one’s congregation, one should be aware that most professionals that call themselves “Christian counselors” are Christians in their personal lives but their counseling is secular. One more thing. If you, as a person’s pastor, refer him or her to another for biblical counseling, you remain the primary counselor responsible, and the counselor to whom you make the referral must recognize and honor your pastoral authority. What that means is that the person being counseled and the counselor, must agree that that you are within the sphere of pastoral privileged communication and will receive regular confidential updates from the counselor. If that is not agreed to, you should not make the referral and you should inform the counselee that you will pray for him but that he is on his own from that point forward insofar as counseling is concerned.

One more thing. If you choose to counsel a person or refer him or her to another counselor, be sure that the you, the counselee, and the referred counselor are of the same gender. It is outright dangerous for men to counsel women and women to counsel men for obvious reasons of attraction. It is not enough that the counseling be done with an open door because words that are spoken close proximity can be as much of a problem as physical touching. Men should therefore counsel men, women counsel women, and teams of men and women counsel couples. Brief isolated conferences between men and women are unavoidable in the real world, but the nature of what is discussed in such conferences must be carefully managed.

## 5. Leading by Silence

Dan will probably not remember this incident, but years ago Beth Messiah had a small *chavurah* that met at a member’s home. I was a relatively new believer at the time and was part of that group when one day Dan attended. At some point in the evening, a debate sprung up about a biblical issue the nature of which I have long forgotten. What I did not forget, however, was that the discussion became heated and most everyone in the room was injecting his and her opinions except Dan and me. I was not injecting because I did not know enough about the subject, but why was Dan remaining silent and not injecting? I was baffled as to why everyone was arguing about a subject that I was sure Dan knew the answer to, but no one was bothering to ask him and were just going on and on about it among themselves. The effect on me of Dan’s silent self-restraint was profound. If I were him, I would probably have jumped to my feet and shouted:

*“Idiots! Don’t you know that I, your pastor, am here for you to ask? I know ten times more about that which you are arguing, and you aren’t even interested in asking my opinion!”*

But that is why I was not the pastor, and Dan did not do that; he just listened and remained silent. I do not know what Dan was thinking at the time, but his silence taught me a lesson in humility that I never forgot. Thank you, Dan, for your leadership of silence.

One of Ohev Yisrael’s members, Jill Melton, published a book entitled “The Power of the Zip.” The “zip” is our closed lips, and while the book is directed toward a secular readership, the concept that silence has power is completely biblical and mirrors the testimony I just gave. I cannot help but recall [Isaiah 53:7](#)’s description of Yeshua during the ordeal of his crucifixion:

*“Though mistreated, he was submissive- he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to be slaughtered, like a sheep silent before its shearers, he did not open his mouth.”*

## **6. Passing the Baton of Leadership**

I want to conclude with the subject of passing the baton of leadership. I apologize to those of you who heard this yesterday at Ohev Yisrael when the baton of congregational leadership was passed from me to Rabbi Aaron, but it is too important a subject to not deal with today.

Passing the baton of leadership is a recurring theme of the Bible. In early times, family leadership (i.e. birthright) was passed from father to firstborn son with occasional exceptions. God himself caused Abraham’s leadership to pass through Isaac, and we no doubt remember the tumultuous way in which Jacob received his birthright from Isaac despite his brother Esau being his first-born fraternal twin.

I am also reminded of how the leadership of Israel passed from Moses to Joshua; we read in [Deuteronomy 34:7-9](#):

*“Moshe was 120 years old when he died, with eyes undimmed and vigor undiminished. The people of Isra’el mourned Moshe on the plains of Mo’av for thirty days; after this, the days of crying and mourning for Moshe ended. Y’hoshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of wisdom, for Moshe had laid his hands on him, and the people of Isra’el heeded him and did what ADONAI had ordered Moshe.”*

There were also occasions when leadership passed, not because of the leader’s advanced age, but due to his having committed sin. Such was the case when God transferred Saul’s leadership of Israel to David; we read in [1 Samuel 16:1](#):

*“ADONAI said to Sh’mu’el, “How much longer are you going to go on grieving for Sha’ul, now that I have rejected him as king over Isra’el? Fill your horn with oil, and set out; I will send you to Yishai the Beit-Lachmi, because I have chosen myself a king from among his sons.”*

Continuing with verses 10-12:

*“Yishai presented seven of his sons to Sh’mu’el; but Sh’mu’el told Yishai, “ADONAI has not chosen these. Are all your sons here?” Sh’mu’el asked Yishai. He replied, “There is still the youngest; he’s out there tending the sheep.” Sh’mu’el said to Yishai, “Send and bring him back, because we won’t sit down to eat until he gets here.” He sent and brought him in. With ruddy cheeks, red hair and bright eyes, he was a good-looking fellow. ADONAI said, “Stand up and anoint him; he’s the one.””*

So, David received Saul’s mantle of leadership, but his initially ruddy cheeks, red hair and bright eyes eventually gave way to age, and in 1 Kings 2:1-3 we read:

*“The time came near for David to die; so he commissioned Shlomo his son as follows: “I am going the way of all the earth. Therefore, be strong; show yourself a man. Observe the charge of ADONAI your God to go in his ways and keep his regulations, mitzvot, rulings and instructions in accordance with what is written in the Torah of Moshe; so that you will succeed in all you do and wherever you go.”*

Concluding with verses 10-12:

*“Then David slept with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. David had ruled Isra’el for forty years- seven years in Hevron and thirty-three years in Yerushalayim. Shlomo sat on the throne of David his father; and his rule had become firmly established...”*

We also read in 1 Kings 19:16 how God told Elijah that Elisha, the son of Shafat, would become Elijah’s successor, and we read in 2 Kings 2:9-15:

*“After they had crossed, Eliyahu said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away from you.” Elisha said, “Please! Let a double share of your spirit be on me!” He replied, “You have requested a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, you will get what you asked for; but if not, you won’t.” Suddenly, as they were walking on and talking, there appeared a fiery chariot with horses of fire; and as it separated the two of them from each other, Eliyahu went up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Isra’el!” Then he lost sight of him. Seizing his clothes, he tore them in half. Then he picked up Eliyahu’s cloak, which had fallen off him. Standing on the bank of the Yarden, he took the cloak that had fallen off Eliyahu, struck the water and said, “Where is ADONAI, the God of Eliyahu?” But when he actually did strike the water, it divided itself to the left and to the right; then Elisha crossed over. When the guild prophets of Yericho saw him in the distance, they said, “The spirit of Eliyahu does rest on Elisha.” Advancing to meet him, they prostrated themselves on the ground before him...”*

There are other examples of leadership succession as well, but I will jump forward to the most prominent of them all, the one where Yeshua was preparing to return to his Father in Heaven and told his disciples in John 14:26:

*“But the Counselor, the Ruach HaKodesh, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything; that is, he will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

So, the *Ru'ach* HaKodesh succeeded Yeshua, but he was not the only one—Yeshua’s disciples succeeded him too, for he told his disciples in [John 14:12](#):

*“Yes, indeed! I tell you that whoever trusts in me will also do the works I do! Indeed, he will do greater ones, because I am going to the Father.”*

Similar to how Elisha succeeded Elijah in his prophetic ministry by receiving his spirit when he was taken to Heaven, Yeshua’s disciples succeeded Yeshua in his ministry by receiving the Holy Spirit whom he sent back after he was taken up. And we who are Yeshua’s present day disciples are successors to his early disciples in that we have inherited their ministry of succession—making new disciples of those who will, in turn, succeed us by making other new disciples, and on and on.

We must not hold on to our positions of leadership beyond when God says: “It is time to move on.” We see it in Scripture and, if those occasions are too far distant, we need only look to our own *shaliach* Dan. Dan was one of the founders of the UMJC and its early president, and now it is in the hands of others. Dan was the congregational leader of Beth Messiah that he built into the flagship of our Maryland Messianic Jewish congregations, and when circumstances required it, he turned it over to another. Finally, Dan was the founder and *shaliach* of Tikkun International which he recently turned over to Asher Intrater, while retaining to himself the *shaliach* leadership of Tikkun America.<sup>30</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

Well, that is all I have to say today about leadership, but there is much more. Leadership has its rewards and disappointments. The main disappointments that I recall were the occasions where I poured all I had into individuals who subsequently left my congregation without even a “goodbye.” The main rewards more than made up for it though. They were the moments of realization that I made a difference in people’s lives and did not realize it until people I had not seen for years told me.

—CJB

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<sup>30</sup> In 2019 Dan Juster turned the leadership of Tikkun America over to his son Benjamin Juster.

## Leading a Peer Bible Study

*Delivered November 10, 2012*

I have noticed, over time, that some of us are reluctant to lead Bible studies among our peers either because we think we do not know enough or because we think we do not have enough time to prepare. Even seasoned *chavurah* leaders sometimes become overburdened in preparing their Bible studies and come to a place where they want a break! The truth is that such “burn-out” can be avoided if leading the Bible study is approached in the right way. Of course, careful time-consuming preparation is necessary if your way of leading a Bible study is to be its teacher—to deliver polished discourses on biblical subjects, present flawless analyses of portions of Scripture, and be looked to as an authority for answers. Some of you are gifted as teachers as spoken of in Ephesians 4:11-12:

*“Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. Their task is to equip God’s people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah...”*

But you who are Ephesians 4 gift teachers are not the main ones to whom I am speaking today. The title of this message is “*Leading a “Peer” Bible Study*,” but it might also be called: “*Leading an ‘Iron Sharpens Iron’ Bible Study*” or perhaps even “*Leading a Berean Style Bible Study*,” inspired by the following Scriptures:

Acts 17:10-11: *“But as soon as night fell, the brothers sent Sha’ul and Sila off to Berea. As soon as they arrived, they went to the synagogue. Now the people here were of nobler character than the ones in Thessalonica; they eagerly welcomed the message, checking the Tanakh every day to see if the things Sha’ul was saying were true.”*

Proverbs 27:17: *“Just as iron sharpens iron, a person sharpens the character of his friend.”*

I have a theory that any Bible-believer with minimal knowledge and little or no preparation can lead a Bible study so long as (1) there is sufficient cumulative biblical knowledge among the Bible study participants, and (2) you the leader do not present yourself as an expert. The trick in leading this kind of Bible study is to ask questions, let the answers come from the participants, and let the diversity of comments from the participants rub against each other to produce the desired “iron sharpening iron” result. But just as one who uses a sharpening iron must hold it at a correct angle to the knife or tool in order to sharpen it, you as the Bible study leader must evaluate the comments being made in your study and direct the discussion in a way that will be profitable.

But there are risks in this approach. One of them is that if your group is lethargic that day and does not feel like participating, you may ask questions and get silence in return. “NOT GOOD!” And if that is the case, your “studiers” will probably snooze through any other approach as well. Another risk is that if the members of your group are not adequately schooled in biblical truth they may not recognize unbiblical comments or analyses when they hear them. If you don’t either—“ALSO NOT GOOD!” But I am talking about leading a Bible study among Messianic Jewish and Christian believers where there is usually an abundance of biblical knowledge and experience from which to draw.

In the past, I believe I was over-restrictive about who I would allow to lead a Bible study because I worried that false biblical doctrines might go unnoticed and unchecked. I still have that concern if the study is of the kind where information flows mainly from the teacher to the student. But that is what I now call a “*Bible teaching*” as distinguished from a “*Bible study*,” and is not what I am discussing with you right now. The apostle Paul taught the Bereans and, after he taught them, the Bereans studied to confirm his teaching. I am talking to you now about something similar—a peer leading his peers in studying the Bible as the Bereans probably did, sharpening each other’s understanding in the process. Hopefully, this message will exhort some of you to move into the ministry of Bible study leadership, not necessarily as Ephesians 4 “gift” teachers, but as “peer” leaders.

The opportunities for leading Bible studies are many—at home with our families; with co-workers during lunch breaks; with gatherings of neighbors and friends; and I may as well also put in a plug for our jail ministry where a crew of us lead Bible studies every Monday morning. I am a teacher, but I use the “peer” model of leading wherever possible because it is much more motivating than listening to a teacher lecture. If, after prayerful consideration, any of you want to try your hand at leading a Bible study, I have a few suggestions that will help you to get started.

1. Select a portion of Scripture to study rather than a topic. Topical studies require more biblical knowledge and prep time than Scripture studies, and this message is directed more toward those who are new at this and have busy schedules.
2. Select a portion of Scripture that has some interesting issues in it to discuss. Studying genealogies may stir the juices of scholars but are not usually motivating in Bible studies.
3. Announce to your group the portion of Scripture to be studied, explain how you intend to go about leading the study, and what you expect of the participants. Explain that it will be a discussion, and that everyone’s participation in presenting material, asking questions and offering opinions is very important.
4. If there is time, you can let your group know the Scripture portion to be studied ahead of time, but do not be naive, believing that most people will prepare for the study, and then be upset when you find that they have not.
5. This seems like a “no brainer” but be sure to tell everyone to bring a Bible of a reputable translation, a pencil, and a pad of paper. Paraphrases (such as the Living Bible) should only be used as commentaries, but there is one exception; although David Stern says that the *Tanakh* of his Complete Jewish Bible is a paraphrase, it is so good in its interpretations, that I allow its use as a translation.
6. Set an approximate time for the study and keep to it. Open with prayer, begin on time, and end on time. If you consistently wait for late arrivers, you will train your group in being consistently late.
7. Do not assume that anyone has read the study portion ahead of time. If you do, you are likely to be disappointed.



8. Do all the out-loud reading yourself while asking everyone else to follow in their Bibles. I know that it is common to ask others to read, but unless you have people in your group who can read fluently and project their voice with interest, allowing persons to read who stumble in reading publicly will diminish everyone's oral comprehension. There is another reasons as well; participants in your study will own different translations of the Bible, and listening to sequential readings from different versions can be confusing.
9. Within the portion of Scripture under study, if verses you want to discuss are widely separated by text that, in your opinion, does not contribute (e.g. a genealogical list), feel free to skip over the "in between" portions or summarize them rather than read them.
10. Do not read long passages. Read only enough to acquire the context and until something perks your interest to discuss. Then stop and ask a probative question about what you have just read. If you cannot come up with a question, ask: "What do you think about what I just read?"
11. When a participant in your study contributes something that you think is correct and valuable, tell them so and thank them for it.
12. If a participant in your study says something that surprises you because you haven't thought of it before and you do not know how to answer, thank him (or her) for raising the point and say that you will study the matter, pray (if appropriate), and bring it up again at the next study session. You can also confess that you do not know the answer and ask: "Does anyone here think they have an answer to this?"
13. If a participant in your study suggests that you are wrong about something, do not be defensive. Consider carefully what the person has to say, and either clarify what you have said or admit that you are wrong and thank him or her for pointing out your error.
14. If a participant in your study asks a question that is valid but would take too much of the Bible study's time to answer, ask the questioner if he can narrow the question. Alternatively, explain that you do not have the time now to answer such a broad question, but that you will be happy to discuss it with him afterwards. Do not be seduced into taking a great amount of the Bible study's time by attempting to answer too broad a question.
15. When a participant in your study says something that is not correct or is incomplete, your skill in communicating it without offending is crucial. Knowing the person and his or her sensitivities will certainly help, but you have to play it by ear. Saying "Wrong as usual!" is probably not going to be received well, but it can occasionally be said in jest to someone with whom you are in good relationship. Here are some responses I sometimes make to comments that I believe are wrong or incomplete:
  - "What you said is interesting. What do you others think?."
  - "What you said is interesting. Do others here think he (she) is right?."
  - "I can understand why you think that, but consider this as an alternative, etc.."
  - "A very interesting point of view. How do you think that fits with "ABC" Scripture?"
  - "Okay, but what about..."
  - "That is a possibility, but there may be more. Anyone else?"

And in the right circumstance and with the right person, I have been known to say something like:

- “Bzzz! Wrong answer! Go directly to jail! Do not collect \$200.”

16. If you notice that a certain member of your Bible study participates very little, you might try drawing him out by directing a question to him. However, make sure that the question is the kind for which knowledge is not needed since you do not want to embarrass an already withdrawn person by their having to admit that they do not know, or they do not understand. You could ask questions like:

- “Jack, you haven’t said much. Is there anything you would like to ask or add to what has already been said?” or
- “Jack, is what Bob said clear enough to you, or do you want him to restate it?”

17. If a participant in your Bible study speaks too frequently, too long, off-subject, or unbiblically, you must take control of the situation as soon as you become aware of what is happening. It would be uncomfortable for everyone were you to attempt to deal with the person publicly, so you should take him (or her) aside for correction, or you can try one of these approaches in the group:

- “John, you obviously have a lot to contribute and you know a lot about the subject, so please understand that, when I see your hand raised but call upon someone else, I am not ignoring you; I am merely trying to get a diversity of opinions and responses.” or
- “John, I am sorry to interrupt you. What you are saying is interesting and valuable, but you are not answering my question. My question is...” or
- “John, I am having trouble following you because you are giving me so much more than I asked. As an experiment in conciseness, can you answer my question in one sentence? Alright, in five sentences! If you can, you get a prize. Who will help us count John’s sentences?”

If you try the last suggestion, you had better be prepared to come up with the prize!

18. End the study session with a prayer but, before you do, ask if anyone has any last thoughts or comments and, if applicable, reveal what will be studied at the next session.

—CJB

## Passing the Baton of Leadership

*Delivered November 17, 2018*

Our meeting here today is for a very special occasion, which is passing the baton of Ohev Yisrael's office of Senior Rabbi from me to Rabbi Aaron Allsbrook, and the passing of his office of Associate Rabbi from him to me. This plan for leadership succession was on the elders' drawing board due to my advancing age even before we knew of Aaron's availability. Such planning should occur in all synagogues and churches, but alas it is not because those in senior leadership too often try to hold on to their positions until they either die in office or declining health precludes their continuing. In either case, the senior leader's abrupt departure results in a leadership crisis due to no one having been groomed to step into the vacuum. Sometimes the aging leader succumbs to pressure and leaves the congregation disgruntled, taking loyal congregants with him. I am happy to say that Ohev Yisrael is not such a congregation and, in fact, began its tradition of orderly leadership transition twelve years ago when Scott Moore stepped down as Senior Leader in order to make a place for me, and stayed on as an elder, thereby helping me to be successful.

Interestingly, passing the baton of leadership is a recurring theme in the Bible. In early times family leadership (i.e. birthright) was passed from father to firstborn son with occasional exceptions. God himself caused Abraham's leadership to pass through Isaac, and we no doubt remember the tumultuous way in which Jacob received his birthright from Isaac, despite his brother Esau being his first-born fraternal twin.

I am also reminded of how the leadership of Israel passed from Moses to Joshua; we read in Deuteronomy 34:7-9:

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There were also occasions when leadership passed, not because of the leader's advanced age, but due to his having committed sin. Such was the case when God transferred Saul's leadership of Israel to David; we read in 1 Samuel 16:1:

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*cheeks, red hair and bright eyes, he was a good-looking fellow. ADONAI said, "Stand up and anoint him; he's the one.""*

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*"Then David slept with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. David had ruled Isra'el for forty years- seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Yerushalayim. Shlomo sat on the throne of David his father; and his rule had become firmly established..."*

We also read in 1 Kings 19:16 how God told Elijah that Elisha, the son of Shafat, would become Elijah's successor, and we read in 2 Kings 2:9-15:

*"After they had crossed, Eliyahu said to Elisha, "Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away from you." Elisha said, "Please! Let a double share of your spirit be on me!" He replied, "You have requested a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, you will get what you asked for; but if not, you won't." Suddenly, as they were walking on and talking, there appeared a fiery chariot with horses of fire; and as it separated the two of them from each other, Eliyahu went up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Isra'el!" Then he lost sight of him. Seizing his clothes, he tore them in half. Then he picked up Eliyahu's cloak, which had fallen off him. Standing on the bank of the Yarden, he took the cloak that had fallen off Eliyahu, struck the water and said, "Where is ADONAI, the God of Eliyahu?" But when he actually did strike the water, it divided itself to the left and to the right; then Elisha crossed over. When the guild prophets of Yericho saw him in the distance, they said, "The spirit of Eliyahu does rest on Elisha." Advancing to meet him, they prostrated themselves on the ground before him..."*

There are other examples of leadership succession as well, but I will jump forward to the most prominent of them all, the one where Yeshua was preparing to return to his Father in Heaven and told his disciples in John 14:26:

*"But the Counselor, the Ruach HaKodesh, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything; that is, he will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

The Ru'ach HaKodesh succeeded Yeshua on earth, but he was not the only one; Yeshua's disciples succeeded him, for he told his disciples in John 14:12:

*"Yes, indeed! I tell you that whoever trusts in me will also do the works I do! Indeed, he will do greater ones, because I am going to the Father."*

So, analogous to how Elisha succeeded Elijah in his prophetic ministry by receiving his spirit when he was taken to Heaven, Yeshua's disciples succeeded Yeshua in his ministry by receiving the Holy Spirit whom he sent back after he was taken up. And we who are Yeshua's present day disciples are successors to his early disciples in that we have inherited their ministry of succession—making new disciples of those who will, in turn, succeed us by making other new disciples, and so on.

But our business today is to transfer the title and responsibility of Congregational Leader of Ohev Yisrael to our brother Rabbi Aaron. There are several criteria that are required of the office, primarily those listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7:

*“A congregation leader must be above reproach, he must be faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable and able to teach. He must not drink excessively or get into fights; rather, he must be kind and gentle. He must not be a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, having children who obey him with all proper respect; for if a man can't manage his own household, how will he be able to care for God's Messianic Community? He must not be a new believer, because he might become puffed up with pride and thus fall under the same judgment as did the Adversary. Furthermore, he must be well regarded by outsiders, so that he won't fall into disgrace and into the Adversary's trap.”*

Similarly, in Titus 1:6-9:

*“A leader must be blameless, husband to one wife, with believing children who do not have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. For an overseer, as someone entrusted with God's affairs, must be blameless- he must not be self-willed or quick-tempered, he must not drink excessively, get into fights or be greedy for dishonest gain. On the contrary, he must be hospitable, devoted to good, sober-mindedness, uprightness, holiness and self-control. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy Message that agrees with the doctrine; so that by his sound teaching he will be able to exhort and encourage, and also to refute those who speak against it.”*

There are four other important characteristics that bear mentioning as well.<sup>31</sup>

- a. He must be gifted and skilled.
- b. He must be theologically astute.
- c. He must be competent in organizational management.
- d. He must be a team builder.

Ohev Yisrael's elders have compared Rabbi Allsbrook to all the above criteria and have concluded that he is well qualified. So, with assurance that it is a biblical precept to pass leadership from a leader of advanced age to one who is younger, let us turn to today's matter at hand which is transferring the position and title of “Congregational Leader of Ohev Yisrael” (along with its authority and responsibilities) from me, Ohev Yisrael's current Congregational Leader, to my associate, Rabbi Aaron Allsbrook.

—CJB

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<sup>31</sup> *Passing the Leadership Baton*, Tom Mullins, pp.76-82 (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 2015).



# **G. Messianic Jewish Prayer and Worship**

**Sermons • Vol 1**

## Liturgical vs. Unstructured Prayer

*Delivered October 30, 2010*

Some time ago, I noticed divided preferences regarding certain Jewish practices and the two major approaches to prayer—liturgical prayer from the *Siddur*; and prayer that is unstructured. While some sought to bring more Jewish liturgy into the congregation, others preferred to hold it to a minimum. In my conversations about this phenomenon, a few congregants expressed their belief that relying heavily on the *Siddur* did not allow the Holy Spirit to lead and, from the contrary position, there was a growing worry that non-Jewish-style prayer would eventually yield to more Christian styles and that the Jewishness of our services would diminish.

Folks who held either view expressed concern for Jewish visitors. If services were too liturgically Jewish, secular Jews who had little taste for synagogue worship would not want to come back, and if services were too charismatically Christian, synagogue-affiliated Jews would not come back. You can see how these different points of view created a problem for how to move forward and so, after much prayer and discussion with the elders and others, I concluded that it was better to promote diversity of choice and opportunity rather than try to move us in a single direction.

Before I go further, let me share a few Scriptures about prayer from both a liturgical and non-liturgical perspective. How can I go wrong by starting with what we call the Lord's Prayer—the *Tefilah Adonai*, [Matthew 6:9-13](#)?

*“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*

Is this prayer intended to be liturgy to be read word for word at services and on other occasions of prayer? Perhaps your answer is “no” because it begins “In this manner, therefore, pray,” and so you say that it is only instructing us to pray the essence of the prayer and not necessarily to be read verbatim. Very well, but now let us look at how the same prayer is rendered in [Luke 11:2-4](#):

*“So He said to them, “When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*

Here, Scripture does not say “*In this manner, therefore pray...*” It says “*When you pray, say...*” and you are then given the exact words to pray. Now that is what liturgy is—prescribed words or actions that are said or done exactly and repeatedly by a praying community.

Let us remember that the Jerusalem Temple was still operational in the First Century and that God's instructions to the *kohanim* were precise—in other words, they were liturgical. On the other hand, the Israelites who came to sacrifice had to first repent of their sins and there is no precise instruction



or formula given in the *Torah* to guide them in how to do that. So, whatever they said to God and to the *kohanim* was not liturgical; it was unstructured. Here are some New Covenant Scriptures that seem to encourage spontaneous prayer using ordinary speech:

Philippians 4:6-7: “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Messiah Yeshua.*”

James 1:5-6: “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.*”

James 5:16: “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*”

1 John 5:14-15: “*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*”

My conclusion from what I see in Scripture is that there are appropriate times and places for both unstructured prayer and also for liturgy. Now since liturgy to a modern Jew means praying from the *Siddur*; I want to give you my own thoughts on both unstructured and *Siddur* prayer.

Praying from the *Siddur* is NOT my favorite way to pray, and yet I believe that praying certain selections from the *Siddur* during *Shabbat* services and at other times is incumbent upon us because the *Siddur* is the prayer book of our people. Christians believe the Bible, Muslims revere the Bible, and even pagans sometimes study the Bible, but the *Siddur* belongs uniquely to the Jews. If you see a Jew in the street carrying a book on his way to synagogue mid-week, it is almost certainly not a Bible he is carrying; it is a *Siddur*. And if a secular Jew, by reading the Scriptures, develops a repentant heart and seeks affiliation with the most reform synagogue he can find, both a *Siddur* and a *Tanakh* await him at his pew and the *Siddur* will, without doubt, show the most wear. The Jewish sense of membership in an ancient people is foreign to most Christians whose affiliation of antiquity is to a Church—not to a people. That is why, when a Jew finds Yeshua in the context of a Christian church, the pastor usually does not have the understanding needed to nurture him in his Jewish identity and covenant responsibilities. Were he to have that understanding, among the ancient writings the pastor would expose him to would most certainly be the prayers of the *Siddur*.

As I said earlier, praying the *Siddur* is not my preferred way to pray. But neither is pausing at scheduled times during the day for unstructured prayer. My normal way of praying is to dialog with God continuously (often non-verbally) throughout the day. I am aware that God knows my thoughts even before I think them, so I just throw them out there in the raw, undeveloped and often unorganized, and I listen for a response which I almost always get, also non-verbally. I can and do pray in other ways, but this way is my staple, and the Scripture that is my model is 1Thessalonians 5:16-18:

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua for you.”*

In the time I have left for this message I want to touch very briefly on four other subjects:

1. I want to compare the value of liturgical prayer with unstructured prayer.
2. I want to provide guidance on how, and to what extent, we ought to adopt prayer liturgies promulgated by rabbis who we know rejected both Yeshua and the New Covenant.
3. I want to explain the value I see of praying in tongues.
4. I want to conclude with a word about the importance of *kavanah*.

Number 1: The value of unstructured prayer is obvious in that we, in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, are its sole authors, and we are therefore in control of what we pray. We can speak to God exactly what is on our hearts, in our own words, in our own time, and for as long as we like, and God responds in whatever way He chooses as well. The end result is unfettered one-on-one communication that is tailored to the moment and the need. Ironically, the strength of this mode of prayer is also its limitation because it is exceedingly personal, and God instructs us to pray to him as a people in addition to individually:

*2 Chronicles 7:14: “if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

*Jeremiah 29:12-14: “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.”*

When we Jews gather, we can pray in an unstructured way and that is good. But the Jewish People are disbursed around the globe, so how then can we pray as a united people? One answer is that we can pray prayers from the *Siddur* (which is available to all Jews everywhere) at the same time of the day, day of the week, and season of the year. If Jews all over the world pray in this way, we can pray as one people while living in distant lands. Of great assistance in doing this is the fact that all *Siddurim*, despite translation and denominational differences, contain essentially the same prayers—powerful prayers that have stood the test of time and have been set in a universal order so that a Jew who prays from any *Siddur* in a traditional manner joins with his people who are praying similarly somewhere in the world.

Now point number 2 –Adopting liturgies promulgated by rabbis who rejected Yeshua and the New Covenant. The way I see it, the *Siddur* is like the nation of Israel. Neither are at their full potential, but God uses both for the preservation of the Jewish people. Knowing that the traditional *Siddur*

contains a few biblical errors (very few by the way), we must correct them or not use those parts. Knowing also that traditional *Siddurim* contain no New Covenant Scriptures or references to Yeshua, we must add New Covenant material. We are blessed to be living at a time when several Messianic Jewish *Siddurim* have been published, and it would be well for each of us to own one. There is one other thing that we ought to do connected with the *Siddur*, and that is to invite the Holy Spirit in its use. We must remember that most *Siddurim* do not anticipate that prayers to God can be two-way conversations, so the traditional ways that Jews pray the *Siddur* do not include times of listening or departing from the usual order of prayer if the *Ruach* pays us a visit. That is easy to correct, but we must be sensitive to the Spirit and remember to do it.

Now point number 3—praying in tongues. By “tongues,” we mean prophetic speech in either a national language that is not known to the speaker or a language that is God-given and is not naturally known at all. Tongues is too large a subject for this message, but it needs to be touched upon nevertheless because it is mentioned in Scripture as a prayer language that is associated with the New Covenant and the Holy Spirit, and was first spoken in Jerusalem by Jews who were gathering in Jerusalem for *Shavu'ot*. Most of what is said about tongues in Scripture is related to the “gift of tongues,” to “speaking in tongues,” to the “*Mikvah* of the *Ruach HaKodesh*,” and to “praying in the Spirit.” Here is a Scripture that (without ambiguity) alludes to praying in tongues and defines it as praying in the Spirit:

*1 Corinthians 14:14-15: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”*

For the purposes of this message, I will limit my teaching on tongues to telling you how I pray in tongues to advantage. There are times when a situation requires prayer, but I do not know how to pray or for what to pray. Such a situation can occur when praying for something causes us to pray against something else, and that “something else” may be the one that God wants. On such occasions, I pray in tongues without knowing what I am praying, in the belief that God will fill in the blanks.

Another way I use tongues is as a way to pray without having to take my concentration away from something else. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 was mentioned earlier, but it bears repeating here because praying in tongues is one way that we can pray without ceasing; once again, the Scripture says:

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua for you.”*

Continuously dialoging with God and praying in tongues are the ways I try to pray without ceasing.

Finally, Number 4—*kavanah*. The Hebrew word *kavanah* means maintaining a heart intent in prayer that focuses on God. Whether unstructured or with a *Siddur*, our prayers are woefully inadequate if they lack *kavanah*. I hope this short message on liturgical and unstructured prayer will be helpful.

—NKJ

## Liturgy, Holy Spirit, and Time

*Delivered June 23, 2012*

We want our worship services to be Jewish and, at the same time, to be responsive to the *Ruach HaKodesh*. That is a problem because Jewish Services are liturgical and were developed over the last 2000 years by a Judaism that did not (and still does not) embrace the reality of a living Holy Spirit in Jewish lives and in our synagogue prayers. Jewish liturgy is biblical and spiritual but, like the Temple liturgy, is precise and not conducive to being interrupted by a move of the Spirit.

Messianic Judaism, being a New Covenant Judaism, must make place for the Holy Spirit and, in our *Shabbat* service, we open ourselves to receive him through our praise and worship and during our call for prophetic Words. That is not to say that the Spirit does not minister to us through our liturgical prayers as well and through our messages. He most certainly does, but the *Ruach HaKodesh* is a living Spirit, and it is his nature to transcend the structural limitations we tend to place on him.

Spirit-filled Christian services do not have this problem because they tend to have little or no structure and are therefore able to change direction at a moment's notice in response to the Holy Spirit. Does that mean that our Jewish liturgical way of praying is out of God's will? Not at all! Messianic Jewish congregations have a different purpose and role to play than Christian churches—a role that employs ancient prayers and worship forms reminiscent of our covenantal priestly responsibilities, and of our connection to the wider Jewish world. The problem (in my opinion) is not our liturgy; it is rather that we impose an unreasonable time expectation on our *Shabbat* service and have become too time-conscious, wanting to end our service no later than 12:30.

This is not something that is unique to us. All Spirit-led Messianic Jewish congregations in the country wrestle with the time it takes to pray traditional prayers in Hebrew, translate them into English, read Scripture, incorporate New Covenant content that includes contemporary praise and worship, call for prophetic words, lay hands on the sick, give a full message, and manage to end their service before *Havdalah*.

We can be happy with our *Shabbat* service as being liturgically Jewish and yet diverse and spiritual. During the recent Tikkun Conference, the praise and worship and the *Torah* Service that we led brought accolades from many who were inspired to bring what they experienced back to their home congregations. Still, the service fell short of being Spirit-led in that it was almost completely planned in advance and limited by constraints on time.

Scripture is replete with examples of prayer and our need to spend uninterrupted time in it. Consider, for example, [Luke 6:12](#):

*“It was around that time that Yeshua went out to the hill country to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.”*

Now to be fair about it, [Luke 6:12](#) is an example of private prayer—not synagogue prayer, and we know that the prayers and sacrifices in the Holy Temple were conducted at specific times and with timed efficiency. The fact is, the closest we have in Scripture to the Holy Spirit breaking through and

redirecting public worship is what is described in Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit captured the attention of the crowd that had gathered in Jerusalem for *Shavuot*.

The sparse information we have about official proceedings in the synagogue and Temple in the First century is that they were formal and liturgical, with no mention of body ministry or the expectation of being led by the Holy Spirit. There is, however, a biblical reference to believers gathering in the Temple Court and in homes to break bread, praise God, and enjoy each other's fellowship. These appear to be informal gatherings and not services, for we read in [Acts 2:44-47](#):

*“All those trusting in Yeshua stayed together and had everything in common; in fact, they sold their property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to all who were in need. Continuing faithfully and with singleness of purpose to meet in the Temple courts daily, and breaking bread in their several homes, they shared their food in joy and simplicity of heart, praising God and having the respect of all the people. And day after day the Lord kept adding to them those who were being saved.”*

What this means is that we are not going to get a lot of help from the Bible to enhance our understanding of how to invite and incorporate the Holy Spirit into our Jewish services; we will have to find out how to do it from the Holy Spirit himself. One thing is intuitively clear to me though. To some extent, we will have to change our expectation that our service must end at a certain time because, when the Holy Spirit moves on us, we must be willing to follow where he leads regardless of the time it takes. Yes, within reason we can truncate other parts of the service to accommodate, but not to the extent of cancelling its major components the *Sh'ma*, the *Amidah*, and reading from the *Torah*. I believe it is God's will that they remain a core part of every *Shabbat* morning service because they enable us to identify with our Jewish People who pray similarly in synagogues everywhere in the world. Nevertheless, changes in our attitudes about time are necessary if we really want the Holy Spirit to have free reign in our services.

Talking about inviting the Holy Spirit is not the same as actually inviting him, so we will proceed a little differently today. I will close this service now and we will engage in a season of unstructured prayer and of seeking the Holy Spirit. By closing in this unusual way, I am not signaling that we will be ending our *Shabbat* service this way in the weeks to come or that our services will become routinely longer. I am, however, asking that we pray to be delivered from the time-consciousness that has heretofore been pervasive in our service, and also that God reveal to us how we can provide opportunity for the Holy Spirit to function in our midst with greater frequency and power.

—CJB

## Liturgy in the Jewish Service

*Delivered March 24, 2012*

The experience of returning to God and coming to believe in Yeshua was one of great exhilaration because I was propelled from having no belief in God to a relationship with him of great intimacy. “Ahh,” I thought! “So, this is what it is like to be a Christian! No artificial barriers between me and God! Not like my memory of the “dead and boring liturgy” in the synagogue where I received *Bar Mitzvah*. I thought of myself as having become a Christian and no longer being a Jew.

My first congregational experience after becoming a believer was in a church that considered itself “Full Gospel.” What it meant by that was that it believed in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and preached relationship with God through Yeshua and the Holy Spirit. Well, that is what I was doing even before I knew there was a Holy Spirit, so the way the church conducted its services (with minimum form and maximum emotion) suited me just fine. It was enjoyable and it was uplifting.

I told you previously of how, at my pastor’s recommendation, I visited Beth Messiah (a Messianic Jewish congregation) and how, at first, I did not like the experience. I was turned off by its “Jewishness” and especially by its Jewish liturgy because I had come to believe that liturgy stood between me and God. I had discovered a new and exciting way of relating to God through prayer devoid of structure and I did not want to go back to (or even be reminded of) the dryness of the synagogue of my youth.

Well, with the help of the Holy Spirit I eventually transitioned from Christianity to Messianic Judaism, but I retained a “love-hate” relationship with Jewish liturgy for many years. This was largely because I found it difficult to reconcile my new-found Spirit-centered life with praying the same prayers repeatedly, and especially praying words that were composed by people who were not believers in Yeshua.

Well, many years later, here I am leading a service that is highly liturgical. I am sure you have noticed that from week to week there is much repetition in the prayers and worship that comprise our Shabbat service. We begin with *Ma Tovu*, which reminds us of God’s protection of Israel. Next, we sing *V’shamru*, which reminds us that God created the world in 6 days and rested on the seventh. After several praise songs that are selected in advance, we stand for the *Bar’chu* which is a prayer of blessing to God. Following that, we chant the *Sh’ma* and the *V’ahavta* to remind us of God’s unity and of the commandment to love him and to teach his *Torah* to our children and we recite a new liturgy, “Messiah Yeshua,” that acknowledges Yeshua’s Lordship.

Then come several more songs (again selected in advance) and finally there is an intermission in the liturgy when Ohev members can come forward and share “words” they believe God has given them. Following that we pray the *Amidah*—the first two benedictions followed by a song or two, followed by unstructured or silent prayer, and concluding with *Sim Shalom*.

Now we’re finished with the liturgy—right? Not right! We have a *Torah Service* that is entirely liturgical, *Seudat Ha-Adon* (*Shulchan Adonai*) that is partly liturgical, and, of course, the *Kaddish* which is totally liturgical. Now what is really strange given my history and background that I related

to you, is that I have grown completely comfortable with this style of service and, when I evaluate it each week, I find myself satisfied that we have honored God through it.

I am amazed that this is so, and I have asked God to show me what He has changed in me that I can think that way. The answer (I believe) is that I have now come to see our Shabbat service (and other services as well) as ministry to God rather than ministry to ourselves. I used to evaluate a service based on how I fared in it and felt about it. Did it speak to my needs? Did I experience the presence of the Spirit? Did I learn something in the course of it? Did I leave the service uplifted or, better yet, healed? Now there is nothing wrong with any of those benefits, but I now understand that they are extras and not what our services are fundamentally for. Messianic Jewish services are, first and foremost, to fulfill our covenantal responsibility to render priestly service to God, and secondarily to others through intercessory prayer. Much of what is contained in a modern Jewish service is intended to express Israel's responsibility for *Torah* obedience, analogous to the services conducted by the *Kohanim* in the Holy Temple.

The synagogue's origin is reputed to date from the Babylonian exile when the Jews were far from Jerusalem and unable to perform the requisite Temple sacrifices. When the exile ended and the Jews returned to Jerusalem, the synagogue continued as an institution of prayer and study, parallel but secondary in importance to the Temple. The synagogue reached its full expression during Yeshua's lifetime, but became Judaism's main center of religious life after the Second Temple's destruction in 70 A.D. In the absence of the Temple and the resulting inability to conduct animal sacrifices, the leading rabbis of their day (led by Rabbi *Yochanan ben Zakai*) developed a substitute that consisted of prayers to be recited in synagogues at the exact same time of day as the previous Temple sacrifices. This is the origin of the *Shachrit*, *Minchah*, and *Ma'ariv* services on weekdays, and the added *Musaf* service on *Shabbat*. This is also the origin of the modern Jewish service that consists of reading designated portions of Scripture and praying specific prayers in a specified order.

Now there are two ways to look at this. One way is to be critical of the rabbis and say that their rejection of Yeshua is what created the crisis that caused them to establish (what was essentially) a new Jewish religion modeled after the Temple. But another way to look at it is to say that even had the rabbis received Yeshua as their sacrificed Messiah, their response in establishing an institution around which Jewish life and memory of the Temple could be preserved would nevertheless have been appropriate. In my opinion, the rabbis probably did the right thing despite their rejection of Yeshua. That is why I support modeling our Messianic Jewish services after the liturgical plan of the ancients provided, however, that we incorporate Yeshua and contemporary forms of worship to accommodate New Covenant realities. It should go without saying (but I will say it anyway) that praying with *kavanah* (i.e. with prayerful intention) is absolutely necessary regardless of the style of our prayers.

I have not always looked at things this way, so that is why I am now at peace with our service being substantially liturgical, whereas years ago I was not. If it is valuable for us to model our services after those of the ancient synagogue, then our services must be liturgical because the early synagogues' services were liturgical.

But even more foundational, Messianic synagogues, like all synagogues, should seek to help the Jewish people fulfill their God-given covenant to be priests; we read in [Exodus 19:6](#):

*“be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.”*

The Holy Temple of God expressed that priestly mandate through its sacrifices and intercessory prayers, and that is what the synagogue was designed to do when it was first modeled after the Temple.

I know that praying liturgically is not everyone’s preferred way of praying; frankly, it is not mine either and, when I pray privately, I usually do not pray from the *Siddur*. However, the purpose of praying privately is not the same as when we join in prayer as a community. The prayers and proceedings chosen by the synagogue’s leaders should not be an overwhelming issue to the rest of us any more than such things were for the priests who ministered in the Temple. Imagine this if you can: The Temple’s *Cohanim* show up for work one morning and get into complaining about how repetitious their work is:

*“Why do we have to do the same sacrifices day in and day out? Why do we have to always conduct them in the same way and at the same time each day? Why do we have to sing the same Psalms each day? We know that the Shechinah’s presence has not been the same since this Temple was rebuilt,<sup>31</sup> but still, we know God’s Spirit is here, so why can’t we be free in his Spirit to dance and jump and sing when the urge comes upon us? In fact, why can’t we just suspend the sacrifices every so often so we can bathe in the Glory of God? Surely God would want our needs to be met and our Temple’s services to be uplifting and exciting for the Israelites who bring us their sacrifices.”*

I think you know what would happen if they did that and said that. Down would come fire from heaven, and they would quickly experience the departure from routine they desired.

No, the Temple was not a place for its worshipers to be uplifted and have fun. For the priests, it was a place to render service to both God and Israelites amidst a river of blood and the carcasses of slain animals. For the Israelites who brought their sacrifices, it was a place where death was exchanged for atoning life; a place from which they could return home with repentant hearts, sobered by knowing that animals had to die because of their sins. No, the Temple was not a place to have fun but rather to repent, worship God, and render priestly service.

In the same way, synagogue services (including Messianic services) are not primarily for the purpose of our being ministered to and certainly not for the purpose of our having fun. If we are ministered to or we do have fun so much the better; but it is not their purpose. Similar to the Holy Temple, synagogues are places where service is rendered to God through worship and praise, and to men (including to ourselves) through intercessory prayer. They are places where serious spiritual transactions take place and, in the case of Messianic synagogues, are similar to the Temple in that the ministry that takes place in them relies on blood sacrifice—not of animals, but of Yeshua our Messiah. There is an additional feature in Messianic synagogues that make them unique, and that is the presence of the Holy Spirit, reminiscent of the *Shechinah* who dwelt in Solomon’s Temple.

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32 Rabbi Resh Lakish is recorded in Yoma 9b of the *Babylonian Talmud* as saying that, because the Ark and the Tablets did not repose in the Second Temple, the *Shechinah* did not abide there.



By its nature, liturgy is both prescribed and repetitious. Critics of liturgy often refer to Matthew 6:7 where Yeshua is quoted as saying to his disciples:

*“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do...”*

The argument these critics make is that established prayers that are repeated regularly are prayers said in vain and, therefore, praying liturgically is also in vain. Of course, the argument evaporates two verses later where, beginning with verse 9, Yeshua prescribes specific words for us to pray:

Matthew 6:9-13: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*

We should also take note of Yeshua’s words quoted by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 that imply repetition of what has come to be known as the *Seudat ha-Adon*:

*“...on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.’”*

And who among us is willing to tell the four living creatures in Revelation 4:8 that they ought to stop repeating day and night:

*“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”*

Or who among us wants to explain to the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:11 that they are praying liturgically when they exclaim:

*“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”*

For those of us who are still troubled by liturgy, I would like to engage in a little exercise to see if we can improve on the repetition in Psalms 136. Please respond with the repetitious line so we may appreciate the full extent of the problem and perhaps come up with a way to cure it:

*“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!  
For His mercy endures forever.  
Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!  
For His mercy endures forever.  
Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords!  
For His mercy endures forever:*

*To Him who alone does great wonders,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
To Him who by wisdom made the heavens,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
To Him who laid out the earth above the waters,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
To Him who made great lights,  
For His mercy endures forever—  
The sun to rule by day,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
The moon and stars to rule by night,  
For His mercy endures forever.  
To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
And brought out Israel from among them,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
To Him who divided the Red Sea in two,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
And made Israel pass through the midst of it,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
To Him who led His people through the wilderness,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
To Him who struck down great kings,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
And slew famous kings,  
For His mercy endures forever—  
Sihon king of the Amorites,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
And Og king of Bashan,  
For His mercy endures forever—  
And gave their land as a heritage,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
A heritage to Israel His servant,  
For His mercy endures forever.  
Who remembered us in our lowly state,  
For His mercy endures forever;  
And rescued us from our enemies,  
For His mercy endures forever;*

*Who gives food to all flesh,  
For His mercy endures forever.  
Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!  
For His mercy endures forever.”*

Yes, Psalm 136 certainly has a problem that needs fixing. If anyone here has an idea of how we can reformulate it so as not to be so liturgically repetitious, I suggest you email your idea to [yvh@hashem.net](mailto:yvh@hashem.net) and expect to receive a response REAL SOON.

—CJB

## Messianic Jewish Worship

*Delivered July 16, 2011*

For those of us who were boys raised in an observant Jewish home, the emphasis of what we were taught probably had to do with obedience. Go to synagogue, keep *kosher*; keep *Shabbat*, go to Hebrew School, pray Hebrew prayers, study hard, be *Bar Mitzvah*'d, marry a Jewish girl, and become a doctor. If not a doctor, then a dentist or a lawyer. Girls who were brought up in an observant Jewish home had their counterpart of expectations as well—also having much to do with obedience.

Interestingly, this is not so different than the emphasis on obedience experienced by many Christian boys. Dress up, go to church on Sunday, observe Christmas and Easter, sing in the choir, read the Bible, keep the Ten Commandments, be baptized, don't smoke, don't drink don't dance, and marry a Christian girl.

Of course, these two scenarios are poking fun at the religious and ethnic superficialities many of us have experienced in growing up, but they have a serious side as well. They point to the prevailing fact that we have been taught to relate to God more through doing things than through experiencing him and submitting to him heart and soul. But the two ways go hand in hand, for we read *Sha'ul's* words in [Roman 10:8-13](#):

*“But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Yeshua is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” (NIV).*

Confessing with our mouth is the obedience part and believing with faith in Yeshua's Lordship is the heart-relational part.

But once our salvation is assured, what then? We purpose not to sin and if we do sin, we repent and that is a continuation of our commitment to obedience. But what about the relational part? How do we continue in that? Is our relationship with our heavenly Father limited to just obedience and devoid of human emotion? To help answer the question, let us ask ourselves this: What is our experience with other relationships that God gives to us? Do they not all have some emotional component to them? Of course, they do, and so ought our relationship with our heavenly Father. God himself told us how he wants us to relate to him when He gave us [Deuteronomy 6:5](#):

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (NIV)*

The words “All your heart,” “all your soul,” and “all your strength” are emotion-packed words.

Now this has been an introduction to what I really want to speak to you about today which is worship. Although it is technically possible to worship God without our hearts and souls being poured into it, that is not what God wants. I have heard “worship” defined in several ways—some ways that suggest emotional investment, and some that do not. For example, we could consider our worship of God as recognizing his deity; obeying only him; putting him on a pedestal for praise; kneeling before him; revering him; submitting to him; sacrificing to him; devoting ourselves to him. None of these ways of worshiping God necessarily require emotion but without the infusion of emotion, much is missing. Let us therefore put emotion back in by adding to our definition of worship, concepts such as loving him with all our heart, soul, and strength, adoring him, experiencing ecstasy in his presence, and being sent to our knees by his glory. God’s overwhelming effect on men is clearly seen in [Isaiah 6:1-5](#):

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’” (NIV).*

Isaiah spoke these words after being overwhelmed by God, yet we do not usually associate such ecstatic emotion with Jewish worship. Pentecostal worship “yes,” but Jewish worship “no.” It is because, over the years, the expectation of emotion in Jewish worship has been lost, much in the same way as Jewish rootedness was lost in the Church. Here are some examples from the Bible of emotion in Jewish worship which, if they occurred today, would probably not be recognized as either appropriate or Jewish by many in the wider Jewish community:

[Act 3:6-8](#): *“Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Messiah Yeshua of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them— walking, leaping, and praising God.”*

[2 Samuel 6:14-16](#): *“Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. Now as the ark of the LORD came into the City of David, Michal, Saul’s daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.”*

[Psalms 150:1-6](#): *“Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!”*

Psalms 42:2(1)-3(2): “*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*”

Psalms 84:2(1)-3(2): “*How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*”

Psalms 98:4-8: “*Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn; shout joyfully before the LORD, the King. Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together.*”

Most Jewish worship today is essentially what is contained within the *Siddur*, which is praying, singing, bowing, praising, blessing, thanking, occasionally fasting, and once a year laying prostrate. Orthodox synagogues today do not use musical instruments; Conservative synagogues generally do not, and Reform synagogues allow the use of organs. Dancing is not part of a Jewish service, but choirs are common, and occasionally we hear about a synagogue that employs modern musical instruments. Jewish worship today is mainly liturgical, somewhat subdued, and typically lacking in spontaneity and emotion. By contrast, Jewish worship in days gone by, while also liturgical, contained a spontaneous and expressive component that was authorized by God, and was part of the normal Jewish experience.

So, has modern Judaism lost its spontaneity completely? No, it did not thanks to the *Chasidim* who seek to connect spiritually to God through animated, musical, and sometimes mystical ways. Their conservative way of dressing is in stark contrast to their exuberant way of worshiping that includes dancing, singing lyric-less *nigunim*, and generally making lots of noise. Their goal worship is to experience the presence of God, and they know that only through God’s Spirit can that be accomplished.

Now I do not want to endorse the *Chasidim* beyond their style of worship because they are involved in some serious errors. For one thing, they reject Yeshua as being the Messiah. For another, some of their mystical approaches to God are patently unbiblical, and they are heavily involved in the study and practice of *Kabalah*. I will mention one more, which is that *Chasidic* communities are centered around a *Rebbe* whom they deem to have a special connection to God. The late Menachem Mendel Schneerson is the *Rebbe* of the *Chabad-Lubavitch* movement, and is thought, by many of his followers to be the Messiah.

All that notwithstanding, Messianic Jews have something in common with the *Chasidim* that is very important. It is our common understanding of John 4:24 (although *Chasidim* would not acknowledge the Scripture), that:

“*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*”

We as they, believe that by giving ourselves fully to worship we can experience the very presence of God. Of course, we do not agree with them on who is the Messiah nor with their other *schtick*, but we do agree that the *Ru’ach HaKodesh* is the essence of God’s presence in the world.

I am telling you all this in order to illustrate, and to assure you, that our “charismatic” approach to praise and worship is thoroughly Jewish both in its history, and in what it seeks to achieve which is experiencing the presence of God. We use musical instruments, and our melodies are different than those of the *Chasidim*, but our expectation of experiencing God through music and dance is the same. Another thing we have in common with *Chasidim* is that both they and we believe we can actually hear from God—we through the *Ru’ach HaKodesh* directly, and they indirectly through their *Rebbe*. As do other Jews, Messianic Jews and *Chasidim* pray liturgically from our respective *Siddurim* but, more than other Jews, we are aware that we can experience the presence of God through fervent worship.

In the course of its development in the Twentieth Century, Messianic Jewish worship was significantly impacted by Christian culture and, in our desire to save it from assimilation, some of us began looking only to Orthodox and Conservative worship forms as being authentic. That was a mistake for those who did, and one that I want to avoid and correct if it exists among any of us. The traditional liturgical forms can be (and ought to be) a large part of our worship, but we must do two things as well; (1) we must adjust them to be consistent with the Messiah and other New Covenant realities, and (2) we must allow ourselves to engage in Jewish charismatic worship that heightens our emotions and enhances our capacity to experience the presence of God.

So, what is Jewish charismatic worship and how do we distinguish it from the kind that is foreign to us? I cannot give you a precise answer because we are in the middle of a movement of God and He is not yet finished moving us. What I can say is that, early on, God gave us worship leaders like Paul Wilbur, music groups like *Kol Simcha* and the “Wailing Wall,” and Jewish concepts of charismatic worship such as “Davidic dance.” Our own Bruce Bakaysa, a refugee from Orthodox Christianity, was brought to the Messianic movement by God and gifted to compose Messianic music and lead in a contemporary charismatic form of Jewish worship. He is a gift from God, so let us open ourselves to follow his leadership.

That is pretty much all I have to say, but let me leave you with some key Scriptures that depict the biblical normalcy of expressive movement and emotion in Jewish worship:

### **Bowing Down and Kneeling**

*“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.” (Psalms 95:6-7)*

### **Laying Prostrate**

*“And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.” (Deuteronomy 9:18)*

*“So it was, that while they were killing them, I was left alone; and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, ‘Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?’” (Ezekiel 9:8)*

### **Clapping Hands**

*“Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!” (Psalms 47:1)*

### **Lifting Hands**

*“Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.” (Psalms 63:4(3)-5(4))*

*“Behold, bless the LORD, All you servants of the LORD, Who by night stand in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.” (Psalms 134:1-2)*

*“Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in heaven.” (Lamentations 3:41)*

### **Dancing**

*“Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!” (Psalms 150:4)*

*“Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.” (Exodus 15:20)*

*“Let them praise His name with the dance; Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.” (Psalms 149:3)*

### **Shouting**

*“Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Psalms 32:11)*

*“Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!” (Isaiah 12:6)*

*“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.” (Psalms 95:1-2)*

### **Singing**

*“All the earth shall worship You And sing praises to You; They shall sing praises to Your name.” (Psalms 66:4)*

*“My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, And my soul, which You have redeemed.: (Psalms 71:23)*

*“And Miriam answered them: ‘Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!’” (Exodus 15:21)*



In conclusion, let us remember that Jewish charismatic worship is not merely a matter of style—of lifting our hands or dancing in the Spirit. It is a way of connecting with God that is compelled by openness to the presence and power of the *Ru'ach HaKodesh*. So let us not label charismatic worship as “Christian” and shrink from it, but rather let us embrace it as fundamentally and historically “Jewish,” and help develop and return it to its former place in the prayer life of the Jewish people.

—NKJ

## **Obedience, Sacrifice and Worship**

*Delivered March 26, 2011*

Psalms 96:2 says:

*“Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.”*

That’s no problem. I can do that. Psalms 135:19 says:

*“Bless the LORD, O house of Israel! Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron!”*

I am of the house of Israel and I can do that also. Psalms 136:1 says:

*“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”*

I can do that too. Psalms 150:6 says:

*“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!”*

*Baruch HaShem*, I have breath, so I can praise him as commanded. Psalms 134:2 says:

*“Lift up your hands in the sanctuary,…”*

I am in our congregation’s sanctuary, so I can do that as well: Psalms 95:6 says:

*“Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.”*

No problem. I can do that! Well—These days I may have a small problem getting back up but, if not for that, I could kneel down to God with no problem.

Let us try one more. Psalms 96:9 says:

*“Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!”*

Uhh...let’s see. How do I do that? The verse goes on to say: *“Tremble before Him, all the earth.”* Oh, I see. I have to tremble to worship him. But I am not trembling. How do I get myself to tremble if I am not trembling? Perhaps if I can find out what “worship” means it will help. Here is a dictionary definition. It says:

*“Worship: to adore .. to esteem.”*

Well, I certainly esteem God, but right now I do not feel any passion or “emotion” of adoration, and I am still not trembling. Well, at the beginning of this service we had a time of musical praise and worship where we sang songs and danced. I worshiped God then, and today’s time of musical worship was especially anointed, but I do not remember trembling or having any manifestation like that.

Interesting! Scripture says “sing” and I can sing. Scripture says “bless” and I can bless. Scripture says “thank” and I can thank. Scripture says “praise” and I can praise. Scripture says “lift hands” and I can lift hands. Scripture says “kneel” and I can kneel. But “worship?” That seems to be different because, unlike those other things, worship involves my attitude and emotions—giving myself over completely to God and, though I always seek it, there does not seem to be a specific thing I can do to put my emotions into gear and call up worship whenever I want to. I sometimes experience it, but sometimes do not.

Revelation 4:8-11 describes the ultimate worship this way:

*“The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy<sup>1</sup>, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever; the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.’”*

I read it, and I understand it, but I cannot compare my worship of God to that! But I shouldn’t be down on myself about it because the creatures and the elders are face to face with God in heaven and can experience a fullness of worship that is impossible on earth. I can bless, thank, praise, lift hands, kneel, and occasionally approach what the elders in heaven are experiencing, but unless I am face-to-face with God, adoring him with abandon and passion, I am not worshipping as are those elders. And yet, God requires that I worship him at all times, so there must be a way!

Last Saturday evening I attended our Hispanic *chavurah* where I heard and viewed an excellent recorded lecture that touched on the time of the Babylonian exile when there was no Temple available in which the Israelites could sacrifice. I raised a question to the group of why it might be that the loss of the Temple at that particular time seemed to not cause the same crisis within Judaism as the loss of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. As we were discussing it, 1 Samuel 15:22 came to me:

*“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”*

I had never fully understood that Scripture. I knew it was used by the early rabbis to justify substituting *Torah* obedience for the Temple sacrifices they could no longer perform, but just then I saw in it something I had not previously. I had known that sacrifice was a form of worship, but I suddenly saw that obedience to *Torah* was also a form of worship, and I understood why God preferred it over sacrifice. It was because God gave us sacrifice for *our* benefit—not his; we need the atonement, the covering, and the salvation that comes from sacrifice. God, on the other hand, does not need our sacrifices; what He wants mostly is our obedience because that is how we show him that He and only He is our God. Complying with the precepts of *Torah* is our worship of obedience to him—the same as it always was, and it is a major obligation of the Jewish people to bring the truth of worship through obedience to the nations of the world. In fact, when we talk about the Jewish roots of

Christianity to our Christian brothers, obedience to God's Law should be primary. I found a web site where a Christian pastor, Sandy Simpson, could not have said it better:

*"In many churches around the world the concept of "worship" has been redefined and narrowed to mean the time when Christians come together to sing songs, raise their hands, dance around, and get all excited about the Lord together in church. For most of the younger postmodernist relativistic generation the concept of "worship" has become a thing you do once or twice a week to absolve yourself of guilt. The more you can work yourself into a state of bliss in feeling like you are really achieving a state of "worship" by letting yourself go in the music and rhythm of the "worship" time, the more you can justify what you are doing the rest of the week when you are not "worshipping" God. This "worship" then becomes an excuse and justification process whereby Christians can rid themselves of the guilt of not obeying the Lord in their lives. This is not to say that true worship is not done in the time now called "worship." It can be a time of worship, but worship without obedience is no worship at all."*

Is it any wonder that Yeshua said in John 14:15 *"If you love Me, keep My commandments?"* Do you see how this as an open invitation for us to teach "worship through *Torah*-obedience" to the world and to the Christian world in particular?

Now for those of us who follow the theological discussions of Messianic Jewish leaders, you know that what I just said about Gentiles having to obey God's Law raises the specter of what is commonly called the "One Law" doctrine—a doctrine that we do not consider to be correct. Those who claim it teach that the *Torah* applies exactly the same to the Jew as to the Gentile, and they derive their claim from Exodus 12:49:

*"One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."*

and also, from Numbers 15:16:

*"One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you"* The Hebrew word for "law" in these Scriptures is "*Torah*."

What the Scriptures say is, of course, correct. What is not correct is the notion that the "one law" of Scripture—i.e. God's *Torah*—applies the same way for all people and for all times. Let us not get side-tracked and allow those fallacious arguments to keep us from ministering the truth that has been given to us—that God wants Jews, non-Jews, men, women, husbands, wives, children, parents, etc., to obey his Law as it applies to each.

None of this should be shocking since it is connected to what we commonly call the Great Commission. Matthew 28:19-20 quotes Yeshua instructing his Jewish disciples this way:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Notice that they are Jews who are being called to minister to the non-Jewish nations of the world, teaching them obedience. Obedience to what? To Yeshua's commandments which incorporate all of God's commandments—*Torah!*

It is getting time to close now, so permit me to summarize.

1. The precepts of *Torah* pre-existed creation; I did not mention that earlier, but we easily see that it is true from John 1:1: "*In the beginning was the Word,...*"
2. *Torah* always required God's creatures to worship him through both adoration and obedience. Before man was created, God required it of the angels.
3. Before the creation, one-third of the angels led by *Satan* disobeyed and rebelled against God. This refusal to worship him as God resulted in their being cast down from heaven.
4. Soon after man was created, he committed the same sin as the angels. He refused to worship God through obedience, and God expelled him from the Garden of Eden.
5. Sacrificial worship was probably unknown in the Garden of Eden but, ever since the fall, man needed to sacrifice to God in order to retain some semblance of relationship with him.
6. Later, worship of obedience and worship of sacrifice were written into the *Mosaic Torah* as part of the Sinai Covenant and they became the main elements in the religion of Judaism.
7. Sacrifice and obedience were both forms of worship, but sacrifice was for man's benefit, whereas his obedience was what primarily pleased God.
8. Israel was chosen to be a kingdom of priests to the world. That is why only Israelites were required to worship God through sacrifice in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. Gentiles could bring sacrifices, but it was through the priests of Israel that all sacrifices had to be offered.
9. The worship of obeying God's *Torah* was for both Jew and Gentile (as it properly applied to each), but the nations of the world did not know about *Torah*. It was (and always has been) a responsibility of Israel to introduce the nations of the world to *Torah's* universal precepts.
10. When the Children of Israel stopped worshiping God through obedience, God took away their Temple so they could not receive the benefit of worshiping him through sacrifice either.
11. There came a time when God gave to Israel (and through Israel to the nations of the world) a New Covenant. This New Covenant also required sacrifice and obedience but with a difference. The sacrifice was no longer of an unblemished animal—it was of the son of God himself. And obedience was no longer to commandments written on tablets of stone—it was to God's *Torah* written on men's hearts. And to help us read the *Torah* written on our hearts, God gave us the Holy Spirit who resides with us and within us.

This is where we find ourselves today—children of God called to worship him both through sacrifice and obedience. But more than that. We are members of a priestly nation, Israel, charged with a Great Commission—a commission to export worship of God through sacrifice (Yeshua’s sacrifice) and through obedience (*Torah* obedience) to a world that does not know God. It is a great responsibility that we have been given and, by God’s grace and empowerment, we will embrace it to his glory.

—NKJ

## **Prayer and *Kavanah***

*Delivered December 2, 2006*

When we are looking for inspiration and instruction about prayer, it is always good to read about David. In Psalm 55:18(17), David reveals something of his intense prayer life when he tells us:

*“Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.”*

And the apostle Paul encourages us to pray by instructing us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua for you.*

There are different kinds of prayers. For example, there are prayers of petition—prayers where we ask God for something. In Mark 11:24 we read:

*“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.*

There are also prayers where we do not ask God for anything, but rather thank him for what he has done, praise him for who He is, and even sing to him:

Psalm 92:2(1)-3(2): *“It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness every night...”*

Psalm 105:1-5: *“Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore! Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth...”*

Then there are prayers where we meditate upon and confess his Word:

Joshua 1:8: *“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.”*

Psalm 119:97: *“Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.”*

Psalm 119:148: *“My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.”*

Prayer is not only talking to God, but also listening to him and sometimes just being silent:

Proverbs 8:32-34: *“Now therefore, listen to me, my children, For blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, And do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors.”*

Psalm 46:11(10): *“Be still, and know that I am God; ...”*

Prayer is not only expressed in languages that we understand, but sometimes in languages that only our spirit understands, as Paul explained to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 14:14-15: *“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”*

And in verse 18 Paul says:

*“I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;”*

Scripture teaches that there are many postures in which we may pray; we can bow our heads as Moses did:

Exodus 34:8: *“So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.”*

We can pray standing as Yeshua taught:

Mark 11:25: *“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”*

We can bow down our entire body or kneel as Psalm 95:6 teaches:

*“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.”*

Or we can pray on our face as Yeshua also did:

Matthew 26:39: *“He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’”*

Now let us review what we have learned so far about prayer:

- We are given David’s example of praying.
- We are encouraged to pray without ceasing.
- In everything, we are to give thanks.
- We are to have faith for anything we ask in prayer.
- We are to praise God, call upon his Name, and sing to him.
- We are to be still and know him.
- We are to meditate on his Word.



- We are to pray both in the Spirit and with understanding.
- There are many postures in which we can pray—standing, bowing, kneeling, and on our face.

There are many other Scriptures that relate to prayer, but I would like to focus on what are perhaps the most important truths about prayer as they are revealed in the second sentence of [James 5:16](#):

*“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

Let us start with the righteousness of the person praying and look to [Proverbs 15:29](#) to see why it matters:

*“The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.”*

It is a spiritual truth that as we sin we harden our hearts and distance ourselves from God Our prayers become dimmer and dimmer until, in the extreme, even a believer can even reach a place from which he or she can no longer be renewed to repentance

[Hebrews 6:4-6](#): *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”*

The lesson learned from this is that the first step in prayer is self-examination and repentance—making things right with God regarding any sins that we are aware we have committed.

[James 5:16](#) also teaches that, for our prayer to be effective, it must be fervent. In other words, our approach to God must be focused, purposeful, and earnest. There is no formula for this. The words that we pray are not what impresses God; it is our prayerful heart that counts. “*Kavanah*” is a Jewish concept that speaks to this. “*Kavanah*” literally means “concentration or intent,” but it is generally used to mean one’s awareness of speaking to God. One might well ask how a person can speak to God and not be aware of it. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to do, and most of us have fallen into it at one time or another by singing or reciting words liturgically without thinking about what we are saying. For example, a person who sings “How great is our God” but whose mind is a thousand miles away is neither praising nor praying because he or she is not exhibiting *kavanah*. It is the same when we say “*Amen!*” to a prayer of intercession uttered by a brother without listening, agreeing, and internalizing it with intention. Praying in Hebrew from the *Siddur* adds a complexity for English speakers that must be overcome. We must go through the same process of comprehension, analysis, agreement, focus on God, and uttering the words with intention because, without every one of those steps, there is no *kavanah* and therefore no prayer.

While we are on the subject, let me give you several reasons why I think traditional Jewish prayer is sufficiently important for Messianic Jews (and related Gentiles), that those of us who are English speakers should make an effort to learn the Hebrew so we can pray the prayers with *kavanah*:

1. Hebrew is the language in which the Mosaic Covenant was given, and it is the language in which most of the Holy Scriptures are written.
2. Hebrew provides a link to Jews all over the world and particularly to the Jews of Israel.
3. Hebrew is the language of Jewish thought. Languages are unique and therefore certain nuances of biblical meaning cannot be easily conveyed except in Hebrew.
4. Traditional Jewish prayers and their order of use are known the world over, enabling Jews and related Gentiles from distant parts of the world to pray together in a united way.
5. Traditional Jewish prayers link the generations. The same prayers that are prayed today are the ones that our parents and their parents prayed.
6. Finally, knowing liturgical Jewish prayers and the order in which they are prayed enables anyone to initiate or participate in a Jewish prayer service. It diminishes reliance on trained clergy and puts the responsibility on those praying.

Because traditional Jewish prayers are pre-composed and not generated anew each time they are prayed, being steadfast to pray them with *kavanah* is essential. Just as we must do when we are invited to follow along in singing a contemporary song to God, we must internally process each thought within each prayer so that, by the time we allow ourselves to utter it, we do so with understanding and conviction. Although each of the prayers is centuries old and we repeat them at each service, we must keep our focus on God and pray them as though it is for the very first time. That is the true meaning of Psalm 98:1:

*“Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!”*

Also, for those of us who are not sufficiently Hebrew literate, we must allow the Hebrew sounds of others to be in the background while we pull our attention away to pray in English using translations that we carry with us or that are provided. It is only by doing this that we can be certain that we are praying the prayers and not merely pronouncing words.

—NKJ

## Why Prayer Is Necessary

*Delivered May 11, 2013*

I had been searching for a textbook to accompany Dr. Michael Brown's recorded course, "Foundations of Intercession." Although there are many books written on the subject, I was having difficulty finding one that I thought rose to the scholarly level of Dr. Brown's teaching. Dr. Brown is unique in his ability to teach on matters of faith while supporting what he teaches with scholarly reason.

Over several weeks, I reviewed one book and then another, and the same two problems kept coming up. Either there was too much emphasis on formal prayer, or the author had too many "shoot from the hip" opinions that lacked documentation. Someone suggested that I look at a book written by Dutch Sheets entitled "*Intercessory Prayer: How God Can Use Your Prayers to Move Heaven and Earth.*" I did, and in short order I knew I had found what I was looking for.

This excellent book presents "intercessory prayer" in a way that is entertainingly folksy, so you do not realize that it is also scholarly. What I mean by scholarly is that it has supportive endnote references, and I can best explain what I mean by folksy, by reading you a few excerpts:

*"A Hollywood talent judge said of Fred Astaire, one of the top singers, dancers, and actors of all time: "Can't act. Can't sing. Can dance a little." I'm sure Satan has passed his judgment on me at times in my life: "Can't preach. Can't lead. Can pray a little." Thank God for His grace, patience and commitment to me. I've stumbled forward more than backwards in life."*

Here's another one:

*"Because I said so!" Don't you just hate it when that's the reason given for doing something? ...I remember having my knuckles rapped with a ruler for asking the simple question, "Why?" Whack! "Because I said so! Now be quiet and do it!" I still wish I could rap that teacher's knuckles with a yardstick and not tell her why! (Don't worry, we'll deal with forgiveness and inner healing another time.)"*

I'll share one more and then stop, or I'll be having too much fun but doing nothing else:

*"I've discovered that understanding the why of doing something can be a great motivating force. The opposite is also true. As a kid I wondered why the sign said "No diving" in the shallow end of the pool. Then one day I hit my head on the bottom. I don't do that anymore. I used to wonder why I shouldn't touch the pretty red glow on the stove. I found out. I wondered why a fellow in front of me in the woods said, "Duck." I thought, I don't want to duck. I don't have to duck. Then the branch whopped me upside the head. Now I duck."*

I have to confess that, at the outset, I was a bit skeptical about looking for biblical scholarship in a book written by someone named "Dutch." The name reminded me of someone I might meet in a prison exercise yard, but that prejudice did not last long as I got into the reading. Dutch—(See? I am on a first-name basis with him already) Dutch lists some intriguing questions that I know I have

asked, and I am sure many of you have asked as well. (The following are quoted from Dutch Sheets' book):

- “Is prayer really necessary? If so, why? Isn't God sovereign? Doesn't that mean He Accomplishes what He wants, when He wants? If so, why pray?”
- “Is God's will for a Christian automatically guaranteed or is it linked to prayer and other factors?” “Why does it often take so long to get a prayer answered? Why is persistence required? Jacob wrestled with God. Is that what we are to do in prayer? I do not like the thought of wrestling with God, do you?”
- “What about prayer for the lost? How can I be more effective? I get a little frustrated trying to think of new ways to ask God to save people, don't you? I thought He *wanted* to save them. Then why do I feel as though I am trying to talk him into it? Is there a better way? Do I ask for their salvation again and again or simply petition him once and then just thank him in faith?”
- “What about spiritual warfare? If Satan is defeated and Christ [Sheets hasn't learned to talk Messianic] has all authority, shouldn't we just forget about the devil? Does God bind the devil or do we?”
- “What exactly is intercessory prayer? And don't just tell me it is “standing in the gap.” Enough religious quotes and spiritual jargon. I know the thought is taken from the Bible, but what does it mean?”
- “What about protection? Is everything that happens to me or my family simply allowed by God? Or is there something I need to do to procure our safety?”
- “How do we ‘bear one another's burdens?’” ([Galatians 6:2](#)).
- “Is there a right time for answers to prayer or does the timing depend on me?”

And Sheets concludes his list this way:

- “Are you getting tired of all these questions? I know I am—so I'll stop. You may even be tired of asking yourself some of them. I know I was. Many people stopped asking them long ago, and probably stopped praying, too. Please don't do that!”

Permit me to address the first item on Sheets' list:

*“Is prayer really necessary? If so, why? Isn't God sovereign? Doesn't that mean He Accomplishes what He wants, when He wants? If so, why pray?”*

What indeed *is* the value are my prayers? If God wants to heal someone, won't he heal that person regardless of whether or not I ask him to? And why does Paul say in [Colossians 4:2](#): “*Keep persisting in prayer.*”? If I pray for the same thing or the same person more than once, am I not indicating a lack of faith that God did not hear me the first time?

Sheets seeks to answer the question by referring back to the time of creation. He suggests that the reason God created man in his image was so that He (God) could enjoy fellowship through conversation with beings somewhat similar to himself, and assigned stewardship of everything on earth to

man, so that man could have dominion over his environment in the same way that God has dominion over all. Sheets quotes Psalms 8:4(3)-9(8) to remind us of that:

*“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place- what are mere mortals, that you concern yourself with them; humans, that you watch over them with such care? You made him but little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor; you had him rule what your hands made, you put everything under his feet- sheep and oxen, all of them, also the animals in the wilds, the birds in the air, the fish in the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas.”<sup>33</sup>*

Man’s original condition in the Garden of Eden was as Psalms 8 states. He was given stewardship and dominion over all of God’s creation, both animate and inanimate. Adam freely and daily spoke with God as they walked together in the Garden, and there was no need for Adam to ask God’s help in governing because he already had all the authority he needed. If Adam wanted something accomplished in the Garden—perhaps some change—he did not have to ask God for it—he could just do it himself. Remember Psalms 8:6-7: *“You made him but little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor; you had him rule what your hands made, you put everything under his feet ..”* And as written in Genesis 1:26-28:

*Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth.” So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. God blessed them: God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth.”*

But then something happened. Adam disobeyed God by seeking knowledge that did not belong to him even though God had warned him:

Genesis 2:16-17: *“You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die.”*

But it was not only Adam’s disobedience that was so serious. Satan essentially called God a liar when he told Eve the opposite of what God said—that she would not die if she ate of the tree. She, in turn, planted that seed in Adam, so the added seriousness of Adam’s sin was that he believed Satan over God.

Adam and Eve and their yet-to-be born descendants did die in a spiritual sense, in that they became separated from God, and they also died in a physical sense in that they became susceptible to illnesses and other disabilities, and would eventually die a natural death, which was not in God’s original plan. Also, as a consequence of being driven out of the Garden of Eden, Adam lost his authority of

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<sup>33</sup> The New American Standard (1995) translates verse 6(5): *“Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!”*

dominion over God's creation; that was not in God's original plan either. And Adam and Eve were not the only ones to die, for we who are his descendants and all the rest of God's creation died as well. It is what theologians mean when they say we live in a "fallen world." So, where does prayer fit into this? Adam could no longer fellowship with God face to face and for the first time, he had to "pray" to God—that is, speak to him from a distance. I contend that that is why prayer, as we know it originated with man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

God promised Adam that he would die if he disobeyed, and he did die. God could have started all over again with a new creation, but He chose not to do that and, instead, formulated a plan of redemption by which mankind could repent and eventually return to a place of intimacy with him. The redemption was to affect not only man, but all of creation. However, because God's sense of justice runs deep, his plan requires more than our just being sorry for our father Adam's sin; it requires that we make restitution for it because his sin attaches to us generationally. By Adam eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (after being told not to), he was both disobedient and mistrustful of God. Consequently, the restitution that we are called to is to do the opposite—to be obedient to God and trust him completely. Also, Adam brought harm to God's creation instead of good stewardship. Again, our restitution requires the opposite—that we be good stewards of God's creation, both of its people and its things. With regard to its people, we are commanded thusly:

Matthew 22:39b: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*"

It is as though God is calling mankind to act in such a way as to undo what Adam did that caused its fall.

But it is different for us than it was for Adam. Remember, before Adam committed his sin, his stewardship was in the Garden of Eden where he had direct and complete dominion over all of creation. Adam did not need God's moment-by-moment intervention to help him fulfill his responsibilities because God had given him the authority and ability to do it himself. We, however, are not in the Garden of Eden, and this fallen creation with which *we* must deal does not naturally submit to us as Adam's did to him. Because we do not have Adam's authority, for *us* to fulfill *our* responsibility of stewardship (which is part of God's plan of redemption), *we* need to continually go to God for help. And, unlike Adam who (while he was still in the Garden) did not have to pray because he was always within a conversational distance to God, we who reside in this fallen world and in a state of semi-separation from God, have to communicate with God at a distance through prayer and priestly mediation.

In the New Covenant, the distance between man and God has become less because Yeshua is our mediator and the Holy Spirit (who lives within us) enhances the communication. Still, we are not in the Garden of Eden so, for us, prayer is how we must converse with God.

Now we should be able to answer the questions that we asked earlier:

"Is prayer really necessary? If so, why? Isn't God sovereign? Doesn't that mean He Accomplishes what He wants, when He wants? If so, why pray?"

If what I have said thus far does not answer these questions for you, here are some Scriptures that should:

Matthew 7:7-11: “*Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives; he who keeps seeking finds; and to him who keeps knocking, the door will be opened. Is there anyone here who, if his son asks him for a loaf of bread, will give him a stone? or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? So if you, even though you are bad, know how to give your children gifts that are good, how much more will your Father in heaven keep giving good things to those who keep asking him!*”

Ephesians 6:17-18: “*And take the helmet of deliverance; along with the sword given by the Spirit, that is, the Word of God; as you pray at all times, with all kinds of prayers and requests, in the Spirit, vigilantly and persistently, for all God’s people.*”

Philippians 4:6-7: “*Don’t worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God’s shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua.*”

1Thessalonians 5:17-18: “*Pray regularly. In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua.*”

James 5:16b: “*The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*”

Yes, prayer is necessary because it is a component of God’s plan of redemption and the means by which we fulfill our responsibility to be good stewards of God’s creation. And yes, God is sovereign, and thank God that He sovereignly put a plan in place by which we, the descendants of Adam, can contribute toward making restitution for Adam’s sin by prayerfully caring for God’s creation in a way that Adam ultimately did not. Yes, God sometimes intervenes sovereignly in the affairs of men, but mostly he considers it our responsibility and expects us to do the job ourselves—not in our own power because we have none—but by tapping into his power through prayer. And as for the last question: “Why pray?” It is because, if we do not pray, we are not doing our part to cooperate with God’s plan of redemption and, without prayer, He might not act in our behalf when we need him to do so.

To we who are believers in Yeshua I say this: While our personal redemption and salvation is in his sacrifice, let us not be complacent for He did not save us for ourselves alone. There is a global redemption and restoration of mankind that is yet to come and we, the disciples of Yeshua, are called to intercede in prayer for that to happen.

So now that I have laid out my case for why I think prayer is important, what do *you* think? Did God give it to me? Are you motivated to pray more as a result of what you have just heard? I hope so, because I am convicted that there is more eternally at stake than whether one or another of our prayers is answered. Of course, we should want that which we pray for to come to pass, but our motivation to pray should not come only from that. It should also come from knowing that our prayers contribute to God’s great plan for the redemption and restoration of mankind.

—CJB

## Why We Don't Pray More

*Delivered March 21, 2004*

God spoke to Solomon:

2 Chronicles 7:14: *“If My people who are called by My name will humble them-selves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

Solomon was told that God would give special attention to the prayers of God's people who prayed at the site of the Temple—in the sanctified place where God's Name would dwell forever. If you go to Jerusalem today, you will find the place of the Temple, but not the Temple itself. And so, relying on the promise of this Scripture, many Jews and Christians alike gather regularly at the remaining Temple wall to pray.

But what of the rest of us who are not in Jerusalem? Or those of us who go there only for a season? Are our prayers unheard by God or heard less frequently? None of us here thinks that, because we understand that, in the change of Covenant, we have been blessed with new and better promises:

Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34): *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

Hebrews 8:6: *“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”*

One of the better promises of the New Covenant is the relocation of the temple of God's presence to our own bodies—a most convenient place from which to pray:

1 Corinthians 6:19: *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”*

To assure us that our prayers do not need an edifice of brick and mortar—that prayers emanating from our bodily temples are completely effective, we are given Scriptures such as:



Matthew 18:19-20: *“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*

John 14:13-14: *“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”*

Matthew 17:20: *“...for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”*

None of these things are new to us, so why are some of us resistant to praying regularly? And if our leaders are praying, why are not more of our people? We know that more prayer is needed in our communities because we do not see the power of God manifested as promised and, when we call meetings for intercessory prayer, the response is often less than encouraging.

I would like to suggest some of the reasons for our ambivalence to prayer:

**Possible Reason 1: We are unwilling to give God the time.**

Prayer takes time, and time given to prayer is a sacrifice because, if we give it, it is no longer available for other things. Prayer, then, is a selfless act of giving:

Romans 12:1: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”*

Hebrews 13:15: *“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”*

As with any sacrifice, prayer is a choice. Do we use our time for God, or for ourselves?

**Possible Reason 2: We do not fully believe the promises in Scripture about prayer.**

I have already mentioned some of the Scriptures that describe the power of prayer. But we have all prayed for things, some of which have come to pass and some of which have not. In the absence of our knowing why, we have taken our eyes off God's promises and have become doubters. Instead of attributing our disappointment to lack of understanding, we have retreated in faith to accepting our experiences as being truer than God's Word.

**Possible Reason 3: We are confused about how to pray.**

Some people become paralyzed to inactivity when they receive too much instruction on a subject. This may apply to prayer as well. For example, we have all received or given instruction on:

- How much time we should pray,
- How often we should pray,
- To whom we should pray—God? Yeshua? The Holy Spirit?
- What time of day we should pray—Is early morning prayer a requirement?
- With what intensity we should pray,

- With what specificity we should pray,
- In what posture we should pray,
- In what languages we should pray (e.g. Hebrew? Tongues?)
- In how much isolation we should pray—Do we need a prayer closet?
- For what things we should pray,
- With what faith we should pray.

These are all legitimate subjects, and there are Scriptures that speak to each of them. A problem comes, however, when those who are predisposed to legalistic thinking try to be perfect in all of them and begin to approach prayer as a procedure in which to excel, rather than as a natural and intimate communication of the heart. They wear themselves out with their effort, prayer becomes burdensome, and their time spent praying becomes less and less.

**Possible Reason 4: We doubt that our prayers are effective because we do not consider ourselves sufficiently righteous.**

We recall that [James 5:16](#) says:

*“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

And [1 Peter 3:12](#):

*“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”*

When we begin to pray, we remember these Scriptures, become distracted by thoughts about our spiritual flaws, and imagine how unacceptable our prayers are likely to be. What is the point of praying if God is not listening? So, we stop.

**Possible Reason 5: We doubt that our prayers are effective because we do not consider ourselves gifted in intercession.**

We all know people in our congregations who look forward to long sessions of prayer and, when they pray aloud, are eloquent beyond our poor performance. We recognize such people's special gifting and prefer to leave the praying to them.

**Possible Reason 6: We have had the experience of praying for something we really wanted and were disappointed that it did not come to pass.**

We know the Scriptures that promise the effectiveness of prayer so, because our prayers have not always seemed to “work,” we either admit to a lack of faith, or rationalize why we have failed in some other way. In any case, we are not anxious to repeat the disappointment, so we shrink back from praying.

**Possible Reason 7: We find praying to be boring and tiring.**

We talk to God, but we do not sense that He is talking back. So, it is like speaking to a wall; we run out of words and cannot wait to stop and go on to something else.

How many of these possible reasons for not praying touch a chord? Very likely some of them, and if not, you're an exception.

So far, we have dealt with the negatives, so let us get positive. There are some common misconceptions about prayer that, if we correct them, would go a long way toward solving some of the problems we have noted. In this regard, let us discuss the following Scriptures:

Matthew 17:19-20: *“Then the disciples came to Yeshua privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ So Yeshua said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’”*

Mark 11:24: *“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”*

John 14:13-14: *“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”*

The first Scripture, Matthew 17:19-20, teaches that if we only had faith, we would be able to do seemingly impossible things. The second Scripture, Mark 11:24, teaches that we must believe that we already have (or will have) what we are praying for and, if we do believe this, our prayer will be successful. In other words, it is teaching that successful prayer requires having faith for the success. And the third Scripture, John 14:13-14: Is it saying that we can choose to pray for anything we want, simply tack onto the prayer “in Yeshua’s name,” and Zaap! We will have it?

Actually, this last Scripture holds the key to proper understanding. Anyone who claims anything in Yeshua’s name, claims to be his agent—that is, claims to be acting and speaking for him. So, anything that is truly in Yeshua’s name must be something that Yeshua would endorse as his own. And similarly, anyone who declares something to be in his name that is not in accordance with his will misrepresents his agency and commits fraud.

Matthew 7:22-23: *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

So how do we know what Yeshua (or God) would or would not endorse? Simple! We either see it clearly in Scripture, or we ask him. But you say, “Doesn’t Scripture teach that all we need is faith?” Well yes, and knowing what God wants, and believing him for that and nothing else is exactly what faith is. Squinting our eyes, gritting our teeth, and saying over and over “I believe! I believe! I believe!” is not faith!

Here is what Scripture tells us true faith is:

Hebrews 11:1: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*”

The first clause in the verse says that to have faith for something, that “something” must be substantial enough that it can be hoped for, and we must be hoping for it. But that is not the whole of it. Without the second clause, the Scripture would be saying that any selfish, unwise or sinful thing one may hope for can constitute faith. Of course, that’s not right, so let us now focus on the second clause: “*the evidence of things not seen.*”

Evidence is that which points to truth. Most evidence is perceived or “seen” through our natural senses. This “seeing” can (but does not have to) be through our eyes; it can also be through our hearing, our sense of smell, our touch, our taste, and even through measuring instruments. But what kind of evidence can there conceivably be that points us to the truth, yet is “unseen?” through any of these? The only way we can be absolutely sure of something we cannot see or otherwise sense in the natural is for God to reveal it to us.

So, according to Hebrews 11:1, we cannot have faith for anything that God has not revealed to us and, similarly, praying for anything that God has not revealed to us or told us to pray for cannot be a prayer of faith.

If you’re with me so far, it is obvious why the Matthew, Mark, and John Scriptures work. It is because anything that God wants to do, he can and will do. So, if you pray for what God wants, success is a certainty. On the other hand, if you pray for what He does not want, you may be sorry because God may give it to you anyway.

Now this has profound implications that go even beyond effective prayer. It means that we cannot be people of faith if we do not seek to hear (or at least be led by) God’s voice. Hearing God is even necessary to properly understand the Scriptures.

Now let us get back to our main subject, which is prayer. Why is it that God has decided to work through our prayers? He certainly doesn’t have to, since He can do whatever He wants to do. Instead, God wants something done, so he first tells one or more of us who then pray for it so that God can hear the prayers and finally do it. Why?

I cannot prove it, but I think I know why God has decided to work through our prayers. Man was created to have fellowship with God, and fellowship requires walking together. When God created man and placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, He conversed with Adam and Adam responded. In Genesis 3:8, we have an image of God walking in the garden, and later we are told how various men sought God’s face and walked with God—for example, Enoch in Genesis 5:24, and Noah in Genesis 6:9. We are also told how “the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11), and how Abraham was called “the friend of God” (James 2:23).

But according to Amos 3:3, “*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*” So, God must have created man with the intention that man would agree with him—that they would walk together with

one mind—God's mind. But the nature of Adam's sin in the Garden was that, although he knew God's mind, he disregarded it. The consequence was that he became separated from God and could no longer hear God's voice clearly as an everyday experience.

We know the rest of the story—that instead of destroying man as man deserved, God allowed man a path back to him that required Messiah to sacrifice himself, and man to seek God's face and be of one mind with God once again:

Psalms 105:3-4: *“Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!”*

1 Corinthians 2:16: *“For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Messiah”*

So, as I see it, prayer is not only a way of getting things done, it is an exercise in getting re-aligned with God and restoring fellowship with him. Being of one mind with God through prayer is also the surest and most powerful way for man to serve God and contribute to Satan's ultimate defeat:

Ephesians 6:12: *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*

James 4:7-8: *“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...”*

Scripture tells us that we have the mind of Messiah (1 Corinthians 2:16). It is up to us to fill it with God's thoughts.

To summarize:

1. Our people are not praying sufficiently, nor are we sufficiently in faith. The evidence of it is that we are not seeing the power and the miracles from prayer that Scripture promises. A major reason is that many of us do not know that praying in faith requires hearing from God, and we need help in learning how to hear God's voice.
2. Some of the reasons for our not praying sufficiently are our selfish attitudes, and God wants us to repent.
3. One of the reasons for our not praying sufficiently is disbelief in its effectiveness. This is either an issue of faith or of unbiblical self-deprecation. Either or both must be addressed through teaching and discipleship.
4. One of the reasons for our not praying sufficiently is confusion about what prayer consists of and how it ought to be conducted. Some of us think that prayer must be stylized and intense, and always

praying that way becomes burdensome and exhausting. We must teach our people how to walk with God and pray in natural and relaxed ways.

5. One of the reasons for our not praying sufficiently is our lack of understanding of how prayer is connected to our relationship with God. Most of our people value their relationship with God so, once they see the connection, they will increase the frequency and quality of their prayer.

6. Finally, a reason for our not praying sufficiently is that we either do not know (or have forgotten) that being of one mind with God in our prayers is the most powerful and effective weapon that can be used against God's adversary.

—NKJ